

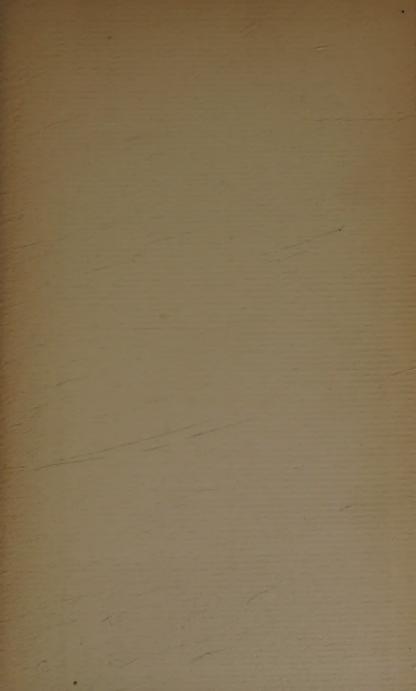
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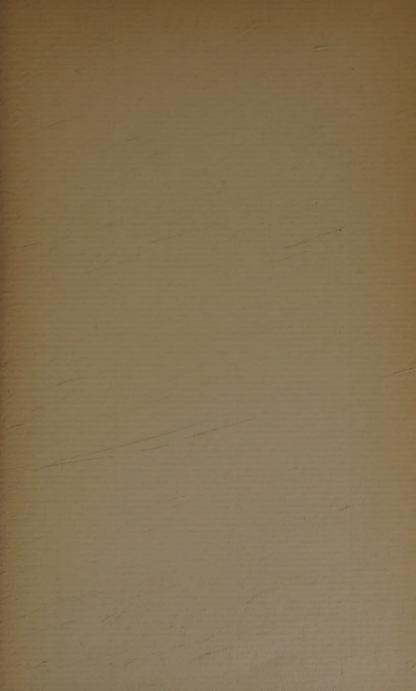
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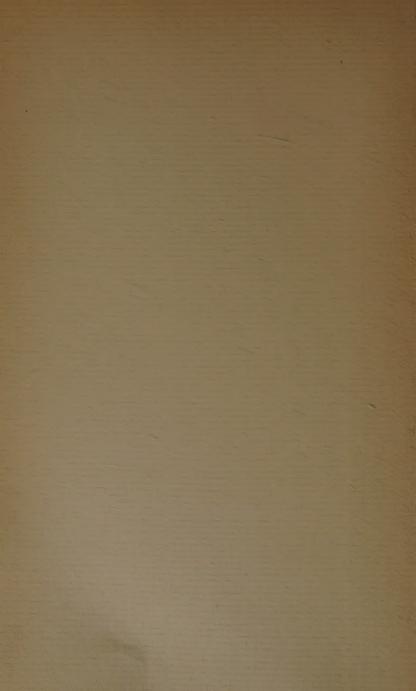
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THE ROAD TO HEAVEN



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New York • A L F R E D • A • K N O P F • London

THE ROAD TO HEAVEN

A Romance of Morals

THOMAS BEER

"Primus in orbe deos fecit timor...."



New York . A L F R E D . A . K N O P F . London

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THE ROAD TO HEAVEN





CHAPTER I

As he came back down the stairs Lamon tripped and was suddenly tumbling while his bag hopped ahead of him and then lay on its side under a lamp stuck to the wall of the entry. But he had to pant a while before his cold fingers managed the lock and his throat hurt until he found the mirror cased in a dirty shirt. He sat on his heels and felt the glass and the silver edge of this thing. He could sell it when the shops opened.

"Is it broke?"

A fat woman leaned out of her door beside the gas jet. Lamon looked up at her and said, "It's all right."

"That's good. Seven years of bad luck for breakin' a glass."

"Thought it meant a death in your family?"

"No," she said; "seven years of bad luck. I've knew it to happen. Fell downstairs, did you?"

"Yes. Caught my heel. Here! Has Joe Tanney moved out of this buildin'? I mean Tanney that was livin' on the second floor. He's an electrician."

She nodded her head.

"Yes. The Tanneys moved out last month. Was you tryin' to get in their place? Yes, they moved back to where he come from. They moved back to this town in Iowa."

"Ohio," said Lamon, cold inside.

"I thought it was Iowa. Yes, they moved out last month. His father died an' left him some kind of farm. So they moved back there. You say it's in Ohio?"

He nodded, sick of hearing her talk. But he squatted and folded his clothes over again because it was no good letting them get rumpled in the bag and he had nothing better to do, now, than this. The woman went on talking about Joe's wife and some man in her rooms rolled on a noisy bed and a smell of new coffee came out into the hall. But she was not old enough or young enough to give him a cup of coffee for a grin. Her voice was hard, too. After she had talked enough to suit her and had peeped at the silk of his evening coat in the bag she said, "Well, good night," and shut the door.

Lamon stood watching the butterfly of thin flame shiver in the globe for a time. Old Peter Tanney was dead and Joe had gone home to take the sloping farm. Joe would make a bad job of it unless his smart brothers stuck to him. He ought to let them run the farm and stick to his wires and bulbs. Lamon yawned and carried his bag outside. On the step he counted his cigarettes

in the limp paper sack and lighted one. The match blazed widely and a tree picked up the glow on hanging leaves. It was a horse-chestnut. Very soon, out in Zerbetta, the children along Grand Avenue would be pitching stones at pyramids of horse-chestnut bloom and the petals would be a soiled scum on the wooden sidewalk. Lamon threw away the match and walked under the tree with his face bent.

Men were waking in this cheap street. Some windows had light coming through curtains. A fellow dodged up from a basement and ran past Lamon whistling. If you lived in a city and had no money, you hung around in streets like this. Big letters glimmered over small shops but nowhere brightly. New Haven had a weak fog clouding everywhere. It was a cool mist, but Lamon's hands sweated. He had to set down the bag for a rest at the corner and smoke hurt his throat, as it did when he was hungry.

There was nothing to do but to wait on a bench until shops were open and he could sell the mirror or perhaps one suit from the bag. He had been a fool not to sell some clothes in Boston this morning. But he had never thought Joe Tanney might have moved, and he had wanted to see Joe a little. And now this had happened.

. . . Lamon walked on quietly and thought of ways to kill time. He stopped to watch the shadow of a naked

man hitch across a shade not high from the street and then he spoke to a pale cat loitering in the gutter and it came strolling along with him, looking at him with lighted eyes.

The street grew rich; white stone showed under windows and buildings began to bulk around Lamon and the cat. And then the street finished in a great place filled with trees. This was called the Green. Lamon had walked here with Joe Tanney and his chattering wife three years ago, pushing one of their kids in its carriage. There were benches, if he could get across the street to one. He took breath and spat away his cigarette. If he sat down he might faint and be taken to jail. But if he did sit down he would not faint on the sidewalk. He stood thinking of his chances.

Then the cat looked past him down the street. Some-body was coming in a hurry that slacked and then was loud once more. Drunk, but not heavy on his feet. As he said, "Hi — you . . ." Lamon knew that he was young. A boy in gray clothes came lunging and spun as he stopped.

[&]quot;I want to get home."

[&]quot;Yeh?"

[&]quot;Want to get back to my rooms. You see? See? An' I'm drunk."

[&]quot;You are?"

The boy plucked at his lips. "Get me home. Money . . . It's an arrangement. You g-get me home an' . . . worth your while. You see?"

"Suits me," said Lamon; "Where do you live, colonel?"

"Sh-show you."

But it was hard to hold up this weight on one shoulder and to carry the bag in his other hand. Lamon sweated and nipped his tongue. He wished the boy would talk. They went jerking up a side of the long park and Lamon had no rest until the boy said, "One — minute," in worried politeness and stopped to haul up his garters which fell down again as he rambled on. The buckles tinkled on stone as they dragged behind his feet.

"No such thing as sin."

"You ain't," said Lamon, "ever lived in Zerbetta, colonel."

"No, not Zerbetta. I'm from Cleveland. Not Zerbetta."

"I'm from Zerbetta, kid."

"Oh!"

They were past the Green. The boy steered to the left. Lamon helped him in and out of two gutters and then panted while the fool pulled up his garters some more.

"Women are funny."

[&]quot;Think so?"

"Very funny. They flop."

Lamon worried, getting his feet up a step in shadows near a huge mess of stone buildings. If his woman was smart she had cleaned the kid out. Suppose he was cleaned out? But Lamon's head was filled with misty lights. He was inside of something, now, climbing steps, his bag hammering softly on an iron rail. Then the boy got out a flat key and toppled against a door. When Lamon undid the lock for him he went marching at a gay lamp on a table. Lamon shut the door.

"There you are, colonel."

You had to speak lightly and gently to drunks or perhaps they got cross. Lamon threw his hat on a cushioned seat under a window's nervous curtains and smiled at the boy who began to stare at him with blue eyes, puzzled about something. He might get cross, now, suddenly. So Lamon grinned.

"God, but y-you're ugly."

"Never was much to look at, colonel. The war didn't improve my face any, either."

"Oh . . . War?"

"Yeh," said Lamon. He picked up a cigarette from the table, staring always in the boy's eyes, and lighted it. Fruit smelled in the warm room, somewhere. "Anything to eat around, kid?" There were oranges in a red bowl in a corner but it was not safe to take one yet. "I'm afraid," the boy said, "nothin' but those . . . those . . ."

"They'll do, thanks."

"Oh, that's quite all right. Help yourself."

Lamon ate two oranges without tasting them at all. This was his first food since a cup of coffee in Boston last night. The boy watched him eating and shook his head.

"I can't say I care for fruit." His voice was clear for a breath. "But . . . I s'pose . . . any —"

"I'm empty," Lamon said, "an' broke."

"What broke?"

"I am, brother."

But that was too much for the pink boy's mind. His head shook. His hands began to wander around among cigarettes spilled from a silver box on the table. He was trying to think, though. He made four cigarettes into a square and smiled down at them.

"Who - are you?"

"Prize-fighter."

"Honest?"

"Honest."

This must be a room in some school or college. The lamp put a sharp light on the kid's face and he had never shaved. But his eyes were going out.

"You owe me some money, colonel."

"Oh, Sorry . . . Forgot . . ."

"That's all right."

Lamon ate another orange and saw the pink fingers getting bills out of the waistcoat. His girl must be a fool. The bills huddled down among cigarettes and books on the table.

"There . . ."

"That's too much, brother."

"You're awf'ly welcome," the boy said and went backward into a fat red chair. This surprised him. He sat blinking and looked around his room as if it was strange to him. He pointed out a brown picture on a wall and stated, "Chartres. M'aunt Emily. Æsthetic." Then he went to sleep.

They were fools to drink that much but there was something in it for them. An old actor had told Lamon about this, swaying back and forth on the edge of a bed in Los Angeles with a glass in his fist. It took you clean out of the world, he said, into a place where everything troublesome was small. Lamon thought you could do that just as well by sitting on a shed's roof, watching the cows or whittling a stick. You went loping off toward the sun; you were on the way to something big and hot. This was what people got drunk for. Lamon tapped a cigarette on the silver box and looked at the kid, dead in his chair. Then he picked up bills slowly,

curling them around a brown finger. When he came to the hundred dollar bill he pursed his lips because his heart jarred so. He rolled the money and put it in a pocket. One of the boy's hands dropped from an arm of the chair and hung down to the heavy rug.

The whole place said, "Money." Lamon became a sniffing dog in the warm room. His fingers swept the stuff of chairs and pillows, touched the cool leather of books in a tall case below the picture of that church in the town called Chartres where he had gone one Sunday with a person in the Red Cross whose name was Edna Weems. He went lightly pacing, stopping to squat down before a pair of riding boots filled with solid wood in a corner and peered up at the photograph of a nice woman who had written, "Sonny, from Mother, Merry Xmas," across her breasts. A bird yelled then. Lamon pulled aside some curtains and saw light running over a deep space on to leaves of a young tree.

They had built this courtyard to look like old houses and churches in France. It was a good enough fake, too. He set a knee on cushions and ate another orange, watching a tower made of ragged stones clear itself of shadows. But a bell struck, somewhere close, in a rise and fall of hard tones. Time to get out. A string of silver spittle trailed now from the boy's mouth to his shirt as he lay in the chair. Lamon turned out the lamp and took one

more orange. Then he went softly down many steps into green morning.

He would not waste a cent in getting to New York if he could help himself and he would take the spare room in Cousin Abner's house if Abner had not got married again. As he had remembered to send Abner a Christmas card for two years it would be all right about staying with him in the white house. Might be a good job at the store. Lamon picked up a pencil and began to draw Abner's face on the bill of fare while a woman was fussing with eggs in the dim lunchroom on a broad street.

"You can draw pictures," the waitress said.

"Yeh?"

"Did they teach it to you in a school, now, or whereever did you learn how to do it?"

"Newspaper."

"Jesus, Mary an' Joseph," she said, "I would like fine to draw pictures. I would like to draw the furniture in the advertisements. Did you draw the furniture in the advertisements or pictures in the readin' part?"

"I drew prize-fighters an' stuff on the sporting page."

"I would like to draw pictures, God help me, but I'm not an eddicated person."

"I ain't either."

"With them clothes on? Go to God, then!"

It worried him to think that his clothes were so good. In bad clothes he could get a ride to New York on a truck but in this fine overcoat and a gray hat from England, still pale and clean, his chances were no good. If his clothes looked bad he could grin himself on a train or a truck and be in New York in a couple of hours. The truck stopping now in the bright street would do and the soiled big driver who slammed into the place would do.

"Dusty."

"Fierce," the driver said; "they ain't had rain in Vermont in a week. A guy told me it's the driest spring he ever seen. Boil an egg, sister. And some coffee. Yeh, the dust's fierce."

"It rained in Boston, Sunday."

The driver gulped coffee and spoke on about the dust in Vermont. His sleeve drew up from a wrist as he lifted his cup. Lamon felt better, seeing crossed rifles and a number tattooed on that wrist.

"Wasn't you at Le Mans in the war?"

"Lee Mans? Yeh. We was only there a week, though. Yeh, we was at Lee Mans. Bitch of a town, wasn't it?"

"I thought I'd seen you somewhere. Yes, Le Mans was a dumb kind of dump."

Lamon pushed his hat back from his forehead and

waited for the man to ask about his scars. They appeared like three purple commas just below his black hair. It took the driver a minute to see them.

"Shell, I guess," said Lamon. "Two or three dropped right in the middle of my battery. We were gettin' across this creek. You been drivin' all night?"

"Yeh. They sent me up to clean out this old place in Vermont. Some kind of rush about it. I got to unload at Ryan's this mornin' if I can make it."

He was a dull talker. Lamon sat beside him on the driving seat of the green truck and listened to his stuff about Ryan's. A lot of rich bastards liked to buy this old furniture at Ryan's and trucks were sent to clean out big farmhouses up in Connecticut. You got into fights with women who had sold beds and tables to Ryan's agents and then didn't want to hand them over. And this trip into Vermont had been fierce. The heavy truck went pompously out of New Haven and Lamon listened to the man.

"Ryan's is the big store on Fifth Avenue up above Forty-ninth Street?"

"Yeh. It's a bitch of a store," said the driver. "They got six trucks."

Everywhere earth was turned up in fields and gardens. Men in Bridgeport were looking at little plots and staring at vines on porches before they started off to work in factories. Birds passed against the sky and there was a smell of dung from barnyards outside all these towns. One place an old horse with scarlet sores on its back had been sent out to graze under apple-trees that showed signs of bud. Lamon was happy, drowsy in the sunshine and did not have to think about New York getting nearer. But New York would be pretty bad.

"Huh?... Oh, I've been selling sportin' goods in Boston. Gymnasium stuff. Gloves and punching bags and all that kind of junk."

"I was wonderin' what you done to eat," said the driver. "Goin' to work in New York?"

"My cousin's got a store. Guess I'll work for him a while."

"Kind of store?"

"Books."

"Yeh? What's his name?"

"Coe," Lamon yawned; "But his place is the Albatross Bookshop."

"Yeh? An albatross's a kind of a bird, ain't it?"

"Yeh."

"I guess there's money in books an' magazines if you got the capital to start with. The thing is," the driver said, "to get some rich bastard to lend you the money. I knew a guy that got some money off a rich bastard an' set up a tobacco store and he's doin' fine. But I dunno

how he got the money off this fellow. You was in a artillery outfit in France? I'd of gone in the artillery but I'm no good with horses."

"I'm all right with horses. I'm off of a farm."

"Yeh? Where?"

"Ohio," said Lamon; "Zerbetta, Ohio. It's south of Cleveland a couple of hours."

He could have talked to Joe Tanney about horses and the farm but this fool knew nothing of those things. He came out of a tenement some place and spent his time in streets. He most wanted to talk about the war. Lamon listened and grinned through towns and fields.

"We'd got this lieutenant named Rafferty. He was a rich bastard from Pittsburgh. He come walking up the line and says to me, Why the hell ain't your coat buttoned? I says, The buttons is tore off and I ain't got any more. He says, That's your business, corporal. A corporal's business is to set the men an example. You can start gettin' those stripes off your sleeve, he says. He was a rich bastard from Pittsburgh named Rafferty. I seen him the other day comin' out of a hotel with two dames. He was from Pittsburgh."

Numbers of officers had wronged this man in France and he told Lamon all about them in his loud, slow voice, speaking importantly as if it mattered. Lamon said, "Yeh," and, "That's the hell of a thing!" and

watched a good tree go past or a field's shimmer. This machine beside him would talk as long as he thought anybody would listen to him. He had a round, handsome face without any meaning in it and his women had petted him until he was just a talking ape. He spoke of his wife and Lamon stopped watching trees to be sorry for her a little, a woman in a cheap flat somewhere who had to listen to this over the dishes and in bed. But New York was getting itself out into the land, now, in signs of hotels and shops beside the roadway and Lamon began to think about Ranulph's office. It was not worth while to go there in daylight. After dinner Ranulph would be glistening at his desk in the empty room, waiting for business.

"Ever hear of a guy named Ranulph? Manages fights an' all that. Has an office up on Sixth Avenue?"

- "Randolph?"
- "Ranulph."
- "A Polack or somethin'?"
- "No. Plain American," said Lamon; "knew him in the army."

Now and then, a dozen times in three years, he had heard men speak of Ranulph. Last week in Boston a young bully in a silk shirt had said to a man going out of a poolroom, "Tell Ranulph I got me a good job up here." There must be thousands of fellows all over the

country who knew Ranulph. Being a person like that was to be a town in which men had spent a week.

Only he must stay clear of Ranulph if he could. Cousin Abner was the best thing and it would be no trouble to get along at Abner's house, even with the dressing for dinner and the talk about books. Lamon thought precisely: If I'd gone to college Abner would be good company. I'd know enough about all that junk to be interested and talk to his crowd. He knows a lot. But your mind has to run that way to be interested or you've got to be trained to it. I ain't. I have to try and be interested. It's a strain, but I can do it better this trip. I'm not a kid any more.

His mind worked easily, these days. It must come of being nearly thirty years old and not a kid any more. He could get along with anybody, now, and no trouble. He could get along with his father if he had the chance because he knew more about men like John Coe. The fine part of not being a kid any more was this: you knew how much like each other some people are.

"Was you ever in the fightin' business yourself?"

"Me? No," said Lamon. "Oh, I box some."

"You got the build for it."

"Think so? I'm slow on my feet, though."

The driver spoke of prize-fights through three towns. Sunlight hurt Lamon's eyes and New York moved at him under the brim of his hat in many shadows. The truck ducked below a bridge and into a wide street fenced with tall flats and then it crossed a river. A wincing came in Lamon's throat at the smell of these streets in Harlem and it gave him a quick joy to see trees of the park ahead over blocks of cars and people. But a crowd pooled out from the curb in front of a theater and a policeman waved his gloves, yelling at drivers.

"Accident."

"Yeh. Jesus," said the driver, kicking his brakes, "looky there!"

A red brook slid out from among feet over the asphalt, picking up dust on its run and passed glittering and slow before the wheels of the truck. At the curb they had thrown newspapers down on the body in the gutter and these fluttered between legs of the watchers.

"Get along! For God's sake get along!" the policeman was howling.

The truck shivered and went forward. Lamon saw the driver's face green at the lips and the machine turned in until it bumped the sidewalk.

"What's the matter?"

"Blood!"

"Yeh. What about it? Look out!"

The man put his hands on his mouth and began to vomit through his fingers. Lamon grabbed his bag and

jumped. Standing on the flags he looked at this fool for a breath, then shouted, "Well, thanks!" and walked away from the policeman bustling up.

Policemen certainly had a tough time of it, for all they might make in graft and the funny pleasure some of them took in their power. Now what could the policeman do with that fellow and his truck? He couldn't arrest the silly ape, either. All he could do was to stand and bawl at him until the man was well enough to drive ahead. It was a tough job and no wonder that policemen were such dumb fools, generally. Lamon climbed to the top of an omnibus in One Hundred and Tenth Street and pitied a policeman who was trying to tell an old lady something on the ground. Then he looked to the right at the Park all the way around the corner and down Fifth Avenue. A magnolia was still in bloom and one sycamore was left from a knot of three that he remembered. He was wondering what had happened to the others when someone began to look at him over her shoulder. The omnibus quivered and halted and went on five times as she peeped. She was a slim, young woman whose hair was pale, and she had a nice, straight neck. As they got near the gold man on horseback at the end of the park she turned fully in her bench and smiled. Lamon somehow knew her and his face was hot. He sat still and she rose to come to him.

"You don't know who I am."

"Do, too! But you been growin' up some!"

She was so young he could say that.

"I just got in from Boston," he said, standing up in the aisle. "What are you doing in New York, for the love of God?"

"Music lessons. And Brick's in the Navy and the family thought it'd be better to have me here. I'm living in East Fiftieth Street. The name's Vermilye in the telephone book. Mrs. A. Vermilye. You can remember that?"

"It's certainly nice seein' you, Elizabeth," Lamon said and grinned; "When did Brick go on the ocean?"

"On the ocean! You always say such idiotic things! Last year. He wanted to so much and — I've got to get off. Do call me up!"

She swayed from sight down the stairs and Lamon gulped, putting his hat on, glad he had taken it off, because the Parchers had nice manners and lived without ever being loud with each other in the white house up the slope from the Coe farm. Until she said that about her brother Brick he had not known this was Bess Parcher. She had been away at boarding school in the March when he came home from his job on the newspaper in Chicago. He had not seen the girl in three years. He really had not seen her often since the war. Why, she must be twenty!

When they gave the big party for soldiers on Fourth of July in 1919 she was just a flat kid sitting with her mother and his Aunt Marian on the edge of the gymnasium in the high school and she had blushed when Lamon came and took her out to dance. This was the last he remembered about Bess except talking to her bits on his way into town from the farm. But Lamon had given her and her black-haired brother a bath in a tub in their house, once, when they were babies with Mrs. Parcher laughing at him and young Brick bawling to beat hell.

. . And Brick was in the Navy and Bess was so grown up she could be here, in New York, all alone!

Lamon's face was still hot. He thought: "She wasn't scared of me! She's got more sense than that damn cousin of Tom Errol's that wouldn't talk to me on the beach at Santa Monica. I bet Brick gettin' in trouble at school makes her think a man can get in a jam about a woman and be all right still, and she's sensible, anyhow. . . . Vermilye, was that the name? I could go and see her a couple of times."

It was like getting a letter from Tom Errol or from his Aunt Marian, with a lot of news in it. This girl lived right next door to his farm, and the Parchers were nice folks. They were dignified people. Mrs. Parcher had been a school-teacher before she was married and fat, and she had kind, jolly manners. And Bess hadn't shown it

if she was scared of him. And that was fine. He went on thinking about her as he lugged his bag westward into Forty-ninth Street and he was smiling when he came into the stinking lobby of a hotel. Then he choked in smells of tobacco and perfumes welling out of people in deep leather chairs and hated the clerk for his oiled hair.

"I want a room till dinner."

"Three dollars."

"Go to hell, Bill," said Lamon; "you don't need your rooms till midnight. There's your dollar. Gimme a key."

"Make it one fifty, sport."

"That's a room an' bath?"

"Right. There's your key."

Grits danced on the white sill of the bathroom's dirty window as an elevator jarred up and down its shaft. But Lamon was too sleepy now to care and he had not bathed in two days. In Boston his landlady had taken to hanging around the door of the bathroom asking him for money. Hot water rose in the tub while he shaved two dark patches on the sides of his chin and then covered himself with lather. Soap frothing in his curls made him look like his father always and Lamon grunted at the glass before he slid into the water and lay grandly soaking. It was fine to be clean again and to feel his muscles slacken in the heat. After he had polished himself on two soft towels he stretched up his arms and bent

sideways and backwards to know how strong he was inside his brown skin with sunlight piling on him through the bedroom's one window. Below him the tops of cars were black coffins floating along ceaselessly and the pane quivered to some big jolt of the street as he pulled down the shade. But he was safe, for this time, from the city and the noise of people. He went to sleep and did not wake until eight o'clock.

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CHAPTER II

FTER Mrs. Hortense Gibney had her hip crushed in the fall of the elevator that afternoon when she was going down to the office of Melton, Weinsheimer and Custis with some papers for Mr. Brand, Mr. Brand himself took her case to court and his speech to the jury was in all the papers. He wept earlier than usual in his address, they told Mrs. Gibney, and several of the jury wept, too. Mrs. Gibney thought of him kindly after that. She had worked twenty years in Brand, Ely and Ledyard's office without knowing that Mr. Brand liked her at all and she had hated him every day. But he made the firm give her five thousand dollars as a reward for her long services and the Cohasset Trust Company building had to pay her thirty thousand and the insurance company gave her thirty dollars a month. So Mrs. Gibney moved to the first floor of the house in East Fiftieth Street, having lived on the fourth floor eighteen years.

Now she had time to care for her nails, which did not get soiled on the typewriter or chipped at the ends any more. Her mother's family, the Doggetts, all had beautiful hands. In the mornings the chambermaid brought her a bowl of tepid water and Mrs. Gibney sat in her wheeled chair close to the front window in a rose-colored robe, doing her nails and watching people go by her eyes, eight feet down from the window. Life, she often thought, was a perfect pageant when you had time to look at people, and women just never knew what holy shows they made of themselves. She told her landlady this when Mrs. Vermilye came up from the basement with her tray or when one of the other boarders stopped in or when her brother came on visits down from Bennington, older every time, to see that she was all right, not knowing that her will was made and that everything would go to the Church of Christ, Scientist. And she was not getting any older, as Mrs. Vermilye took real trouble with her meals, and the chambermaid was attentive, and there was nothing to worry about in the least. Life was so full of interesting things and the telephone was just outside her double door in the hallway. At night she wheeled herself back into her bedroom and the chambermaid helped her into bed, although it was not necessary; but Mrs. Gibney spent all day at the front windows and knew what went on in East Fiftieth Street.

It had been a dull morning, with the children at school, and the slim, fair actress who lived around the corner in Beekman Place had gone by so swiftly in a yellow taxicab that Mrs. Gibney was not sure of her hat. It looked new but perhaps it was the red one cleaned up and fresh in the light. Mrs. Gibney saw the Parcher girl on the front steps with pleasure and hoped for a little talk. Of course the sailor who came last week might not be her brother — his hair was dark — but she was so pretty and behaved so well that Mrs. Gibney hoped he was.

"I'm so glad you came in, Miss Parcher. Have you been at your singing lesson?"

The girl leaned on one of the brown double doors and smiled.

"No, I rode up to Grant's Tomb and back. It's such a nice day and there isn't much smoke. . . . Mrs. Gibney, just what is a life estate?"

"An estate for life?"

"Yes. Like this, I mean. A friend of mine had a grandfather who died — I think it's four years ago — and his will said that his father . . . I mean this boy's father, was to have the place — it's one of the biggest farms in our county — for his life and then it all goes to Lamon, to this boy. But suppose his father sold the place?"

"Oh, but he can't, my dear! That would be quite illegal! He can't move against his son's rights in any way."

"I'm so glad of that," Miss Parcher said, taking her little hat off her bright head, "because his father doesn't like him. They just never get along. And he's such a nice boy. He was the first man to enlist in Zerbetta in 1917 and he was wounded very badly. Only Mr. Coe doesn't appreciate him at all. I've been thinking about him all morning. You know how some person you don't think of ordinarily comes into your head?"

She moved, but Mrs. Gibney did not want her to take her cool, sweet voice out of the room.

"Do sit down a moment, dear. There's the most interesting article in the *Monitor* about Russia. I've been wanting to read it to you ever since I saw it."

"Just let me get my sewing and I'll come straight back."

She ran up the stairs and began to sing in a glad, loud way that was new to Mrs. Gibney and the sound echoed all through the narrow house.

CHAPTER III

A the north side of his street after dark because a lamp burned near the door. Lamon came to the broad steps and stopped a little, feeling a tent of thin ice drifting all around him. But he had to go in. Abner's slow voice had said through the telephone that his room would be ready for him and Abner must be at home; the triple window of the big chamber on the second floor was lighted. When Gratiano opened the tall door there was Miss Lambert still sitting on the stairs with the mussed man who was part of Abner's dinner parties and whose name Lamon never could get.

"I am glad to see you," said Gratiano; "I put the bag in the room, yessir."

He trotted upstairs. Miss Lambert stopped flicking the handrail with an end of her scarf and chanted down at Lamon, "There you are! Now, before you see Abner, tell me the truth. Put me out of my misery. I want to be sure that debauchery hasn't dulled my intelligence. Were or were you not a galley-slave in a film last winter? Abner says you couldn't have been. I say that I distinctly

saw you being a galley-slave with the most tremendous success in an abominable film last winter. Abner admits you were in Los Angeles but denies the film."

Look out!

"Well," Lamon said, "you win. It was like this. A man came up to some men an' I on the beach at Santa Monica. We were playing baseball in bathin'-suits. He asked if we didn't want to be athletes, kind of, in a picture. Another fool and I did, to see what it was like. I wouldn't act in films for a million a year. We got broiled alive, out in this fake galley with — with nothin' on to speak of. I didn't see the picture, afterwards. Didn't want to. Don't see how you knew me. Must have been a couple of hundred apes in that galley business."

"Knew you instantly. Exalted me like anything. Never expected to see a friend looking so tremendously at ease in just a *cache-sexe* and some false beard."

Lamon blushed.

"It wasn't false. We let our beards grow three or four days. Felt rotten, too. How've you been?"

"Talking steadily," the tall girl said. "And now it's your manifest duty — whatever that means — to stick around and nurse Abner. He fainted like a debilitated dowager at one of the parties last week. Do take some care of him. . . . Abner, I was right about the film.

He did it to amuse himself and wasn't amused. I was right. It was none other than —"

Abner leaned on the rail above her head and said, smiling, "Do be still, Norah. Want some coffee, Lamon? We're just through dinner."

He was not slender, now, but very thin.

"Golly, Cousin Abner, but you're gray!"

"Well, I'm forty, after all. . . . When did you leave Boston?"

"Yesterday. Stopped off to see a man in New Haven and came down this morning. H-how did you know I was in Boston, Abner?"

Abner said in his slowest voice, "I got worried about you. A letter I sent to your address in Los Angeles a couple of weeks ago came back. So I wired Mrs. Meigs in Zerbetta. That was Sunday. She gave me the address in Boston. I wrote —"

"I must ha' just missed it, Abner."

"So you must. Want some coffee?"

"No, thanks. What's this about you bein' sick?"

"I've been seedy lately. Spring, or something. What on earth have you been doing in Boston?"

Careful, now.

"Why," Lamon said, "I came on with some people I met in Los Angeles. They own one of these sportin' goods stores in Boston. They wanted a kind of a manager.

But I didn't like it much. I was there a while. Resigned last week. Guess I'm too much of a farmer to like business."

The mussed man beside Miss Lambert stopped fooling with his red whiskers and drawled, "You're the least agricultural-looking person I've ever seen. I think the whole thing's a myth, you know, the ancestral farm in Ohio and all the rest of it. Abner swears his father came from Zerbetta, Ohio, but I don't think there's any such place."

"Honest to God," said Lamon, "I'm off a farm. Lead me to a cow and I'll show you!"

"Abner," said Miss Lambert, "send Luis or Gratiano out for a cow at once. Perhaps they have one in the zoo in Central Park."

Abner smiled. He was leaning his black elbows on the rail and looking down at nothing. He was always looking at nothing.

"I swear there's a farm. I've seen it. A frame house — very pretty, too — and some barns and cows and all the rest of the apparatus. You shouldn't be so skeptical about the farm. Nearly everybody has a farm hanging to his family tree in this country. How's Uncle John, Lamon?"

Careful, now.

"He's all right," Lamon said and grinned.

Everybody smiled because he grinned. Abner lighted

a cigar in his white fingers and said, "That's nice. Now, I ought to warn you that you've stumbled into one of my literary parties. You might go out to a play—You've still got your latchkey? Good—and then slide upstairs when you please."

"He won't be able to slide upstairs, Abner," Miss Lambert said, "because Benedict Sanderson will be sitting on the stairs, right here, telling some green fool how all the great dead used to bring their prose around to him to be doctored a little, in 1893."

"He won't, because I didn't invite him."

"He will, because he told me he was coming tonight. You might just as well ask this monument of British letters, Abner, because he comes just as readily when he isn't asked as when he is. You ought to know that by this time."

The mussed man said drearily, "Warn me when he comes, so that I can get out. Are there no dentists in England? His false teeth flap in and out when he talks and —"

"Part of his charm. I love to hear him say bawth instead of bath. I love him because he's so untiringly correct. If he dies of camel bite in lower Mesopotamia," Miss Lambert said, "he'll tell the natives to write to the London papers about it and to be sure to say that he went to Eton. And the natives'll do it. He's so com-

pletely insolent that one respects him. Told him I was Irish one time and he said, 'My deah gel, nobody would believe it of you.'"

"Who's the man you're talking about?" Lamon asked.

"He's an eminent author by force of his own procla-

"He sounds pretty bad."

"He is," said the mussed man; "he couldn't be much worse if he was really eminent."

People were always saying this kind of thing at Cousin Abner's parties.

"I tell you," Abner said, "you can escape, Lamon, and make yourself useful at the same time. I've got a book to go to a lady who wants it in a hurry. You could take it over to her place? . . . Thanks. I'll telephone her."

He came down the stairs, walking lightly, slowly, and Lamon was scared of him for a breath. He was one of the men — you met them sometimes — who did not seem to belong anywhere. His black sleeve went past. He did not seem to be there at all. But that was nonsense, because he was Cousin Abner, Uncle Philip's son, and he looked like the Coes.

"He's not at all well," Miss Lambert said, leaning forward.

[&]quot;Honest?"

"Gil Weinsheimer says it's his heart. Try to cheer him up."

"Sure."

Abner spun the dial of a telephone on a chunk of yellow marble that was a strange table in the lower hall.

"Mrs. De Lima, please Mr. Abner Coe."

Both the people on the stairs stopped lounging and sat up.

- "Abner, your private life is worse than I hoped!"
- "Perfectly harmless woman, Norah."
- "I hate to believe it of her!"

"She made herself as conspicuous the other night at the theater," said the mussed man, "as an elephant in an apiary. She came into a box with Costello Ryan. She had about a dozen bracelets on one arm when she took her cloak off. She put her arm up to do something to her hair and half the audience looked, and then you could hear people saying, 'De Li —'"

Abner said into the telephone, "Frankie? . . . I'm all right. . . . Listen. I have that book. . . . No, it cost me thirty cents. Please accept this gift. It's worth as much as that, too. I've been reading it. . . . I'm sending my cousin over with it. . . . Of course I have cousins. Everybody has. . . . His name's Lamon. . . . L,A,M,O,N. . . . Yes. Lamon. . . . Yes. First cousin. . . . No, he's a kid. He's — Lamon, how old are you?"

"Twenty-nine."

"He's twenty-nine. He's a model boy and doesn't drink. He's coming over. . . I might. . . . Is it a big party? . . . I might drop in. So long."

"Why the De Lima, Abner?" Miss Lambert asked.

"She's from Lima, Ohio."

"The sentiment does her credit."

"She's a pleasant kind of woman," Abner said, scribbling on a card. "Run around to her place with this, Lamon. Got your key? . . . Thanks a lot."

Lamon opened the door and at once a tremendous lady in a green cloak roared at a thin man on the steps, "Bach! Stendhal! Poussin! Since those three had me, nobody's touched me! The rest of them were boys — amateurs!"

The thin man shoved her over the sill past Lamon and said crossly, "As far as that goes, the last person worth any serious attention died at Bordeaux in 1828. . . . Hello, Abner! My God, how rotten you look!"

If an old bag like that ever got three men, Lamon thought, it was when she was a kid, or because she had money. He breathed happily, outside the house and walked toward Park Avenue. It had been good of Abner to let him out of a party. Abner's parties were fierce. You could talk to Miss Lambert, who was pretty good fun, or to Gilbert Weinsheimer, Abner's lawyer, and once a civil engineer turned up who had been a friend

of Uncle Phil, Abner's gaunt father. Lamon had talked to him about Uncle Phil for an hour in a corner and the man had acted as though Abner's father were a kind of hero to him. It had been interesting to hear about Philip Coe's bridge in Ecuador and his jobs in California and Texas, and his fight to make some railroad take up the use of concrete pillars. Uncle Phil must have been someone big in his game although Abner never spoke of him. Perhaps this thing of not liking fathers ran in the family.

Park Avenue was cleaned of people and cars. In Madison Avenue a girl was crying slowly into the blue chest of a tall Marine on a corner. Lamon said, "You better marry her, fella," as he went past the two of them. In a big city you could mess around with your woman on the street and not worry about your family hearing of it. In Zerbetta you had to be careful. Nobody would ever know a thing about the Marine and his girl unless they told people.

Fifth Avenue was quiet. Great light came over black trees of the park from the west under a clouded sky. The city would grumble for hours yet. Lamon walked along, scouting Mrs. De Lima's number on white doorways. He caught it suddenly glittering on the corner of a building and had to tramp in under a curved tunnel from the street to the south. Some men in uniforms were waiting

for cars to come to a ledge of stone and one of them jerked a hand toward a bronze door at one end of this platform when Lamon asked what floor Mrs. De Lima lived on. A butler opened this door while Lamon was feeling it with a thumb and led him past some stairs into a room colored purple.

"Madame is still at dinner."

"Tell her I'm from Mr. Abner Coe."

The purple room was lighted by a machine of silver and glass which swung down, glimmering, from the ceiling. Lamon looked at that and then at a raft of huge cushions on the floor. Someone had been lying on the cushions, reading a newspaper, a while ago and had left a print of his body, and two ends of cigarettes in a silver dish. Lamon was wondering whether it had been a man or a girl when a woman all on fire came at him and said loudly, "You're from Abner Coe? Got a book for me? Thanks."

She ran a thumb under the paper and ripped the book out of its folds. Beads sewn everywhere on her white dress bubbled yellow lights. She bent her head over the book and Lamon got a perfume out of her pale hair. Then a man walked between and yelled, "Who's that from?"

[&]quot;You mind your own damn business!" she said.

[&]quot;I want to know who -"

He put a hand on the book. Mrs. De Lima sent her fist smartly into his face and the young man sat down on the cushions.

"Look here! Had just about enough from you for one day! Take your hat and march, will you?"

The boy simply began to cry with his fingers on his mouth. He rolled over on the cushions and bawled so that his black hair rose in spikes from his smooth head.

"Oh, for the love of God! Stop it! . . . Come on in the hall, Mr. Coe. . . . Your name is Coe? . . . Well, let's go on into the hall a minute."

In the hall she sat down on the last step of stairs made of some green stone and stared at the book. Her dress blazed restlessly. Everything stirred in this place. Silk curtains were stirring in a great room beyond the hallway and a maid looked down the stairs at Lamon, smiled, and went quickly out of sight.

"Used to know the man that wrote this, out in Saint Louis."

"Good enough town," Lamon said.

"Used to be, ten years back."

"Places change."

"Yeh," she said, "you bet they do! Hey, listen at that!"

"You hit him an awful punch."

Mrs. De Lima grinned.

- "Suppose I did. Well, he's an awful nuisance."
- "Yeh?"
- "Somethin' awful. Are you Abner's cousin?"
- "Yes."

She looked at him with blue eyes and then was still on the green stone.

- "You do look some like him."
- "Think so? All the Coes have black hair."
- "Indiana, ain't you?"
- "Zerbetta, Ohio," said Lamon.
- "I'd ha' said Indiana, by your voice. Hard to tell sometimes. I'm from Lima."
 - "Played football there once."
- "My God," she said, "the names those towns have! Well, I'll have to go nurse baby some. Listen to him!"

Lamon grinned. She was spinning the book between her palms.

"You slugged him to beat hell."

"Think so? He's kind of exasperatin'. . . . Here, I'm givin' a party tomorrow night. I asked Abner, right now. You come along."

"Thanks, I'd like to."

"Please do. Any time after nine. Good night."

She looked at him while he walked down the hall and was let out of the bronze door. What did she want with a book? Lamon lit a cigarette and watched the men in

uniform help a footman to help a thin old girl out of a monstrous green car. She had bony legs in white stockings that looked like ice. He thought she was a sad business, all painted up, and did not know that he was seeing Daisy, Princesse de Clar, who was coming to try to borrow a hundred thousand dollars from her sister, Bird Westerman of Chicago, who was dying of cancer on the third floor. He thought, "De" is French for "of." Frankie of Lima. . . . Lamon de Zerbetta. My God, the names those towns have. Lamon de Zerbetta.

By this time Mrs. De Lima's pretty baby would be hearing a lot about his manners. A kid that age had not much sense, when it came to handling women. Perhaps they had been quarreling over dinner. Lamon considered Mrs. De Lima, walking down Fifth Avenue, and knew that he was shoving the fair woman out as a curtain to keep something else from his mind. All his body worried, now, and little sparks of heat flowed in his cheeks. He looked at gray windows in shops and tried to think of people passing him. He walked slowly and he walked fast as he came into Sixth Avenue. But the letter which might be lying in a drawer of Bill Ranulph's desk was making him sweat. It might take him right out of here. It might leave him here, among all these windows and all these stinking people.

But he did not want to go to Ran's place. When you

got older you saw it was no use arguing that Ran had been praised by a President for rescuing some folks in a fire down on the East side of the rotten city, and that he was a fine sergeant and had a grand medal. You could not tell people the best about Ran. And any night Billy Ranulph could be in a lot of trouble. . . . Three years ago, this month, Lamon won sixty dollars at dice in the Zerbetta station and came on to spend six weeks in Cousin Abner's house. It had still been fun then to run around looking at toughness, and fun to sit in Ran's office listening to the sleek man at the telephone and watching him tease the hard kids who came in to pay him off bits of loans. But one night a white, angered fellow came in and snapped, "Can you give me the address of Mr. Mulcahy who uses this telephone number?" He was not the kind that had a revolver on him, but Ranulph had lied and then, when the man was gone, had telephoned to Tiger Mulcahy to get out of town. And Ran could say that his trade was just as honest as a grocery, but that would do him a lot of good, if something happened and the newspapers opened him up, with headlines about morality and vice.

I'll go there and get Aunt Marian's letter—she must ha' seen dad by this time—and I won't come back. Got to be careful. Even if I have to tell Abner a lot, I won't say I was prize-fightin'. He probably wouldn't like that.

I'm going to be careful. But Abner ain't an old woman. I bet he'd listen to my side of the thing if dad's written him some stuff. Dad didn't approve of him and Cousin Charlotte when they came out on the farm in 1916. She smoked cigarettes and Abner was kind of free and easy talkin' to grandpop. He'd be on my side. I bet he would.

Lamon stopped in front of a bright window, and stared at a map of the United States with some advertising stamped on its border. Up in Boston, selling boxing gloves and bats in funny Mrs. Wadsworth's store, he had killed time over a game to teach kids geography. It was an ivory map with black pegs fitting in holes that were names of cities. Lamon had jammed a black peg about the map until he thought of himself as something black and tiny, hopping from white city to city. Three years ago he was here, and then home, and then out to Chicago, where Tom Errol got him the job chasing little bills for a newspaper and the men in its dirty office let him draw cartoons of fat prize-fighters and dogs for the sporting page, and then home again, and then out to Seattle, where a boy from Zerbetta taught school and got him a job selling electric iceboxes, and then down to Fresno, and down to Los Angeles, and on back to Boston, and down to New York again. Lamon grinned. The things you did when you had the blues! Anything to kill time.

"Goin' anywhere?" a woman asked, at his side.

He looked in the window. His neck might get hot and he might go with her. He said, "Sorry, sister. Got an engagement down the street here in ten minutes."

"Well, I'm sorry. You got a nice voice. Kind of like a drum goin'."

"My old man says I sound like a cross bull," Lamon said, and walked away.

They like my voice. Elsie Mott said it was the first thing she liked about me, when I came home from Chicago. And folks always like it when I smile. If I hadn't smiled at Elsie, the day after I got back from Chicago, when her kid fell on his tail in that puddle, 'front of the gas office, she wouldn't have smiled back. 'N then we wouldn't ha' got mixed up, and nobody'd have told dad he'd seen us out in the bushes, any night, and I'd be home. . . . And here I am. Here. . . . And I may have to stay here and work.

A train went banging on the tracks over his head and pillars of metal carried on the noise when the cars had gone. In this cheaper street many shops were bright and men idled out of little eating-places. All at once a black cat shot up out of a grille below a window and stood licking a foot right in the middle of the sidewalk. Lamon stopped and crossed his fingers with his tongue between

his teeth. The cat turned and walked back into the shadows. . . . Damn those things! . . . He hurried by the window as fast as he could, so that it should not change its mind and go darting over his feet. And this hurry brought him to the stairs of Bill Ranulph's office. Here he was. Lamon looked back and saw the cat playing with a bit of newspaper on a plate of light set down by the window. It stopped to lick a foot, once, and then danced with the rag of paper in the light, swaying and crouching, pretty to watch from a safe distance. Then it sharply stared toward Lamon and he trotted up the stairs with his fingers crossed again. When he got to a landing he stopped to make a circle on the oilcloth and to spit inside the ring for luck.

Ranulph was reading a novel on his desk below the signed photograph of Theodore Roosevelt which hung higher than all the photographs of fighters and heavy wrestlers around the office. He read novels about murders and detectives when he was not working. Lamon often had thought about him sitting here with a murder in his hands until four in the morning, when he went home to his family in a nice street of Brooklyn and slept all the day. The office had not changed in three years except that Ranulph had put up a big picture of their regiment, and his medal hung from its starred blue ribbon on the frame.

"How you, bud?"

"I'm fine," Lamon said. "How's Mrs. Ranulph an' the kids?"

"They're all right. Where did you drop out of, Lame?"
"Boston."

"I knew you'd be in, 'cause there's a letter here for you. When you get in?"

"'S morning. I'm staying with my cousin."

He lighted a cigarette and kept his hand from the letter on the desk. It lay a foot from his hip as he sat on the edge of the desk, but he dared not touch it. Ranulph had locked his thick arms together on his forehead and was watching out of the shadow over his eyes.

"Hey, was you this Soldier Coe that was fightin' out on the coast last fall?"

"Yeh."

"The hell! Who told you that you was a pugilist, buddy?"

Lamon was red.

"I was champion of the brigade wasn't I, Ran? . . . Well, wasn't I?"

"Mercy me! Excuse me for livin'! Yes, you was. But who told you you was a pugilist?"

"You go to hell! . . . I got two decisions an' knocked out —"

"Yeh, an' then old Micky Conroy, which was there

when Eve had her first baby, goes an' knocks you out in two rounds."

"He ain't so old, Ran. Thirty-five or -"

"He's so old all the hair's wore off his chest. Who told you you're a pugilist? You got this imagination, bud. A fighter ought to have just sense enough to get sore and do like his manager tells him. You got this imagination. A good build ain't nothin', Lame. Look at me. I'm so strong I can hoist up my oldest kid on one hand an' hold him a couple of minutes. He's fourteen an' weighs a hundred thirty stripped. Yeh, but any fighter can knock me out to hell in three rounds. Truth is, I don't like bein' hurt. Nobody with this imagination is any real good fightin'. I was trainin' Jimmy Shibo some last winter. The pup knocked me out once just like that."

"What was you doin' trainin' a fighter?"

"I had to shut the office a couple of months."

"What for?"

"Some trouble," Ranulph said.

He rose from the desk and went strolling across the room to the water cooler for a paper cup. Lamon could look at the letter in this second and saw that it was from Aunt Marian.

"What was you doin' in Boston?"

"Athletic goods store. You ought to've seen me sellin' punchin' bags and stuff. Fifty a week while it lasted."

"Get fired?"

"Yeh. This widow that owned the place picked me up in Los Angeles. We got talkin' on a bus. I came on east with her. Only some damn hog in the store told one of her kids. She had to fire me. There wasn't nothin' wrong, neither, but her kids was sore."

"Yeh?"

"I tell you," Lamon said, "that there wasn't a thing wrong. She'd got this kind of maternal feelin' about me."

"Yeh?"

"Oh, go to hell, Ran! She was a nice woman."

"I believe every word of it, buddy. You got those clothes on fifty a week."

"I got 'em," Lamon said, "playin' cribbage with an old English actor out in Los Angeles. I was the only fella in the hotel that knew how to play cribbage. Grandpop showed me. This old ape was a dog for cribbage. He played it worse than I ever saw anybody playin' anything. I got me five suits of clothes and a lot of meals out of him. He was funny. They pay him big money in the pictures and all he does with it is to play cribbage and dress up. Got drunk every Sunday as regular as a clock. His wife was sleepin' with a director out in Hollywood but he didn't give a damn. She kep' him in jobs and he just played cribbage and dressed up."

"One of these philos' phers," Ranulph said. "Lots of 'em, too."

"But it was funny. . . . Say, who's a girl named Frankie De Lima?"

"Baby Frankie. What about her?"

"She's no baby. Thirty-three or four."

Ranulph put down the water glass and looked at Lamon funnily.

"Ain't you any mem'ry, bud? Baby Frankie!"

"What about her?"

"Oh, God, you're a farmer for keeps! It was all over the papers for a month. This old guy that left her the money wrote her a lot of letters and her lawyer read 'em in court. He called her Baby Frankie. His daughters were tryin' to bust the will."

"When was all this?"

"Three or four years back. What about her?" Careful, now.

"They were talkin' about her at my cousin's. I didn't understand what it was all about," said Lamon. "Saw her in a car this afternoon with a young fella. Who's he? My cousin didn't know. A young kid, awful handsome, kind of a girl. Black hair."

Ranulph picked up his telephone and asked for a number. His sleepy gray eyes had lighted up. He said, "Casavetti would know. . . . This the Cigale? Gimme

Mr. Casavetti. . . . All those people are eatin' there a lot, now."

"All what people?"

"All the rich bastards. . . . Casavetti? Bill Ranulph Oh, that was all right! I'll send you a check for it. . . . Thanks. . . . Hey, who's De Lima trainin' with, right now? . . . A boy with black hair, is he? . . . Oh, one of them? . . . Yeh. . . . A lady was askin' me. . . . Thanks." He put down the telephone. "It's one of the Ryan boys. Costello Ryan. The furniture store up the avenue. His brother's the puke that's in the papers in polo games all the time. They got plenty of money."

"Golly," said Lamon, "you know the whole town, don't you?"

Ranulph liked to be told that. He said, "Well . . . I kind of have to, bud. Kind of have to. There's your letter. Came day before yesterday."

Lamon picked up the letter and whistled a couple of notes, opening it with his fingers cold. He left the green check inside the envelope so that Ranulph should not see it and looked at his aunt's whirly big writing. Sweat came flooding down his sides.

"As soon as I got your letter I went out to the place and saw John but it did not do any good. We had a regular fight. I never saw anybody as downright mean as John is when he wants to be. He says you can not come home as far as he is concerned. I told him it was more Elsie Mott's fault than it was yours and everything I could think of, but it did not do any good. Edward says he can get you a job at the bank if you want and of course you could live here with us. But it is just no good trying to do anything with your father at all. You had better come home and behave yourself and see if that does any good. There is no news. Tom and Pearl got vaccinated last week and are scratching to beat sixty. The Parchers have sent Bessie on to New York to take singing lessons because Brick is in the Navy and they think she can see that he does not get into trouble if she is in New York. Is not that just like the Parchers? I am enclosing fifty dollars because you may need money. Your letter sounded so kind of depressed. . . . ''

He put the letter in his coat and whistled again, with Ranulph watching him from under his arms.

"What was you doin' out on the coast when you wasn't tryin' to be a pugilist?"

"A lot of stuff. Best job I had was helpin' with a fruit ranch in Fresno. . . . I was in movin' pictures some."

"Doin' what?"

"Aw, soldiers an' athletes and that kind of stuff.

One of the crowd. It's a stinkin' way to try an' eat."

"You was on this paper in Chicago, last I knew."

"Yeh."

"What fired you?"

"The sportin' editor. Introduced me to a girl he wanted to get rid of, an' then he didn't want to so much."

"You ain't good lookin'. You wasn't before your face got hurt. And women don't look at anything but a man's face. They—"

"The hell they don't! That's just one of your theories, Ran."

"You got fired off this paper and then you was out on the coast."

"I was home a couple of months. . . . Father kicked me out."

"Yeh?"

"There was this woman next door. Widow. But she'd got kids and we used to go out doors nights and some gabby guy seen us and told father. What the hell do people go and do that to a fella for? So he kicked me out. Quit takin' his socks off in the sittin'-room and said, 'I won't have any damned whoremaster in my house. You can pack up and get out of here after supper.' And you can't talk to a man like him, neither. Aunt Marian gave me a hundred and I went out to Seattle. Knew a guy there.'

"These religious old guys," Ranulph said, "are-"

"Religious? Him? Jesus, I'm more religious'n he is. I believe there's a god, anyways. He don't even believe that. Neither did grandpop. Naw, he ain't religious. He's just respectable. 'At's all. He's respectable. Respectable as hell. I said, 'Hey, what did you do before you got married? Wasn't you ever out with a girl?' He says, 'You mind your own business and get out of here.' It was a nice conversation. I'm the only kid he ever had, neither. . . . Religious!''

The telephone's bell rattled. Ranulph said gently, "Yes?... Yes'm?... No'm, Mr. Shibley ain't in just now... Yes, I can locate him... It ain't any trouble, at all... The Marengo... Yes'm... Yes'm... Yes'm... No, it ain't any trouble. Good night. Good night." Then he picked up his other telephone and said crisply into it, "Tell Shib to get over to the Marengo in a hurry, Ed, and his dame's waitin'."

"Where's that telephone ring to, Ran?"

"'Around the corner."

Ranulph lay back in his chair and looked at Lamon for a while pleasantly.

"If you was good lookin', buddy, I could fix you up all right."

"To hell with that! . . . No, I can't take money off of women. Thanks, and the rest of it. I got to get me

a job, though. I got to get a hold of a couple of thousand. Fast as I can, too. I'm not goin' to stick around here any more."

"What good's a couple of thousand?"

"A lot of good. I can rent a place with it. Work it on shares with somebody."

"What kind of a place?"

"What kind? Land," Lamon said, "a farm. Five or six acres."

"Where?"

"Why, out home, of course. Think I'm goin' to California or Oregon or one of those places? . . . Aunt Marian's got four kids and her husband don't make much. He's a doctor. She can't lend it to me. I just want to rent until father dies off and —"

"You mean you want to go back to this damn place in Ohio and be a farmer?"

"Sure. Yeh. . . . Dad can't keep me out of the place. Grandpop lef' it to me. He's only got it for while he's alive. When he dies, I come right in. That's safe. He can't sell the place or nothin'. I come right in when he dies."

"And then you can sell the place and —"

"Sell nothin"!"

"You mean you're gonna stick out there and just be a farmer?"

"Oh, laugh your face off! Yeh! Yes, that's what! Go on an' tell me it's a damn little dump of a town. I know all 'at. Ain't twelve thousand people in the whole county. Yeh! I want to be home."

"What you scared of? Your old man'll die and then you get this place. And —"

"Only seventy! Hard as nails, Ran. Might last till he's eighty or ninety. No. I got to get me some money an' go home."

"Yes, but what are you scared of? You act like this farm was some damn kind of a heaven."

"Aw, shut your face! . . . I hate bein' away from home!"

A train banged past on the high tracks. All New York piled on his head, poured down his throat in smells of hot metal, shops and streets. He was blind.

"Call this a way to live! God almighty!"

"Hey, for God's sake quit cryin', bud!"

"I want to be home! Oh, Ran, I want to get home!"

CHAPTER IV

A SHAWL of heavy silk drooped more and more from her shoulders as she played and became a swaying scarlet wing. It fell and was a bright pool on the floor when she stopped. Abner had forgotten to listen, watching the silk. What had she been playing? Now she came down the room.

"Thank you so much."

"I wasn't very good. I was thinking of rather a lot of things, and that was not fair to Bach."

"I don't think Bach suffered," he said.

"Thanks."

She took a cigarette from a bowl on his black desk and struck a match.

"Like to play here. One doesn't feel that one's merely another detail in an effect. How courageous of you not to decorate these splendid rooms!"

"Blame my father. He built the house in 1900, just as my mother died. So it's never been decorated. Used to be a plan of one of his bridges over the fireplace, there. I'm glad you like the rooms."

"Was he an architect as well as an engineer?"

"Yes. When he wanted to be."

She brushed dark hair back from her tired eyes and said, "Jolly! To be good at two things in one life!"

"Three. He played the harmonica extremely well."

She laughed. His other guests, banked beyond the piano, were watching her through smoke. They had a veil before them and Abner did not have to think of them.

"Been trying to remember one of your poems."

"That's ghoulish," he said. "Let the dead bury the dead."

"No. It was rather a good one. It was called 'A Literary Evening.' Can you remember it?"

Shutting his eyes, he managed to see the lines printed on cream paper.

"All the mountains and the many bright moons Have slipped down again into a crack Where my mind made them.

And there is nothing left but gravel around me Which indecently goes on talking. . . ."

She said, "Not as good as I thought, or you've left some out. I'm sailing tomorrow and you mustn't be angry with me. Why d'you let the gravel go on talking around you, eh? Perhaps it's my Jewish thrift but I loathe seeing so many guineas' worth of good food and drink wasted on — I am being rude, eh? — on all these cattle."

[&]quot;I like some of them," he said.

"Norah Lambert's a dear fool. Who else?"

"Gilbert Weinsheimer."

"The very acid gentleman? The fashion plate? Why?"

Abner said, "He's the most tactful man I know. When my wife and boy were burned to death — our cottage in the country took fire at night — Gil cabled me they'd been killed instantly in a motor wreck. It took some of the shock off. He does that sort of thing very well."

"Where did you get the news?"

"On a destroyer at Southampton."

"Ugh! The most desolating town in England," she said. "No, there's Newcastle. I shall land at Southampton this day week."

"With great relief?"

"Yes. I hate New York in warm weather. Do you notice a smell — a singular metallic smell? It's all this painted iron and steel you people have around you. It's your national scent, just as ours is mutton with capers. Yes, I'm glad to be out of New York now that May's here."

"And out of America?"

She said gravely, "Yes — and also, no. It all interests me dreadfully. . . . I mean, dreadfully. One feels death so much, over here. You make so little of death, over here, and so much. The ghastly bits in the newspapers about condemned men having their favorite cigarette

while they're waiting for the warders to arrange the electric chair! And then five men fell from the huge new building they're raising next my hotel, and no one cared! The whole country's so full of destructive things. It came on me badly while I was playing in Tchigao — Chicago, last year, and something mechanical took hold of me. I did a ballade as though I were a machine smashing men to bits."

Abner said, "The country is full of death. Old forms and laws and customs crawled out of the sea to die here, comfortably. Fag ends of chivalry and hunks of stale religion. Have a sandwich?"

"No. You've written nothing lately?"

"No."

He looked down the room. Benedict Sanderson's teeth showed blue in smoke above a stolid girl in cloth of gold whose wrists were covered with widths of chiseled silver hiding scars where she once had cut her veins open. Janet Cope was madly talking to a fair boy who mechanically nodded, bored by her talk. Norah Lambert balanced a glass on two fingers, chattering in a corner. They were machines in a steam, rattling on, and he saw them through a pane of glass.

"Why haven't you written again?"

"Oh . . . I'd planned a novel. It was to be a huge cake of ice. Fools and blackguards and saints were to

be exposed in it. It was to be the coldest novel ever written. But the illusion blew up. Went flat."

"Shan't you even write your memoirs as a great literary host?"

"Good heavens ... They came, they ate, they talked," Abner said. "What could one say about that? When did you take up sarcasm? A great literary host!"

"When I come back next autumn," she said, "don't let me find this pack of small cards about. Good-by."

People swarmed at her in the doorway. A celebrity was leaving and the machinery clicked into a higher speed. Benedict Sanderson lurched around the piano to kiss her hands. Then the small cards fell back into their places and the talk swelled. Gilbert Weinsheimer idled away from a woman and looked at Abner as he came for a sandwich from one of the pewter trays on the black desk.

He wanted to cough. A pain scraped his breast from within and his shoulders twitched. A smell of salted meat out of Gilbert's sandwich hardened his throat.

[&]quot;Let me turn them out. You're dead."

[&]quot;No," said Abner.

[&]quot;Go to bed! You're dead tired."

[&]quot;The country's full of death."

[&]quot;Eh?"

[&]quot;I am tired. They'll be going in a minute, Gil."

"Go to bed," Weinsheimer said, "you damned fool!"
"No."

But the party all at once began to go to pieces. Abner became a machine grinning and shaking hands. Benedict Sanderson called him Mr. Conroy in one sentence and Mr. Cole in the next and then remembered, an eye closing, that his name was Coe. A woman kissed him. Voices ebbed downstairs. The Filipinos in their sane white jackets came pattering with trays for glasses and broken sandwiches. Smoke oozed along the ceiling, and the room was clear except for an ugly, dark youth who had slouched down at the piano and was making noises which washed together, soon, as a definite satire. His left hand produced a sugar of old melodies and his right hand kept up a dry clicking, a battering of swift, hard notes. Gilbert Weinsheimer took his crescent glasses from his sallow nose and stood listening. Abner walked down the room.

"What do you call that?"

"The Potboiler Blues."

"Oh! . . . Yes. Typewriters and banalities?"

"Thanks."

The boy's voice was rude and scared. He raised a fence of noise about the piano. Abner looked over his untidy head at curtains of the high double window. The satiric clattering stopped.

"My name's Todd Mathewson."

"Yes. Of course," said Abner.

"You never saw me before," Mr. Mathewson said, rudely. "I came up to see you an' you had all these people here. Been waitin' to ask you a favor. Vin Currey's down at my place. He's all shot to pieces."

Weinsheimer said beside the fireplace, "I hope that he dies without suffering much."

"Mr. Weinsheimer believes that all novelists should be electrocuted, Mr. Mathewson."

"Well, he ain't so far wrong, at that. Vin's down at my place. Nerves all gone. Thinks he's goin' crazy. Hasn't got a cent. His new book's a fizzle."

Abner looked back toward his desk. The check-book should be lying next to an inkwell. Weinsheimer was a rigid black line — an exclamation point — against the white fireplace.

"His wife quit him last month."

"I'd not heard that," said Abner.

"Damn good thing," Mr. Mathewson snorted, "if you could make the poor fool see it. First woman he ever slep' with. Had to get excited an' marry her. I'm in the piano department at Ryan's. Get paid on Fridays. Now, I'm goin' home on Friday night. My sister's gettin' married Saturday evenin'. If I can drag Vin home with me his uncles'll look after him. They wouldn't wire him any money to come home on, though. They're

sore at him. He put 'em in his first novel — the one people liked — and they got sore."

"Why?" asked Weinsheimer.

"Oh, he called them a couple of stinkin' hypocrites and so on. And they ain't. They didn't like it."

"But your amusing friend wires them for money, after that?"

Mr. Mathewson drawled, "Hadn't struck me that Vin's amusin'. His uncles are all right. They'll take the poor fool in and give him a job. But I've got to get him home. Could you let me have thirty dollars, Mr. Coe?"

"I think so," Abner said.

A great spider was dancing and clawing in his stomach. He walked toward his black desk and presently lifted his pen.

"Mr. Mathewson," said Gilbert Weinsheimer, "could you tell me what obligation rests on Mr. Coe to lend this damned fool anything? Mr. Currey probably owes him a good deal anyhow."

"I'm signing a note for this, Mr. Whatsyourname."

"I beg your pardon," said the lawyer.

"Oh, that's all right. Vin's an awful ass."

Abner signed the check and tore it off. Everything proceeded outside him and nothing entered him. He was isolated in a bowl of glass, and all noises, all thoughts ran as water runs on the outside of this bowl.

- "Damn good of you."
- "Not at all. Good night."
- "Good night."

He sat looking at a sheet from a cheap little notebook on which Mr. Mathewson had written his name and the date. Then a tall cup filled with steaming milk appeared at his elbow on the desk.

"Drink that," the lawyer told him, "before it gets cold."

Saliva rose under Abner's tongue. But he had to drink with Gilbert watching him and Luis waiting for the cup. He drank. Heat exploded in his mouth. . . . The spider drowned in his stomach. Warmth spread everywhere. He set back the cup on the tray.

"You are no dinner. You've smoked at least six cigars since dinner. You are the damnedest fool I ever saw."

"You're an old woman, Gil."

"God," Weinsheimer said, "how I hate a swine like your young Currey! He first blackguards his own people in a rotten novel and then yells to them for help when he's in trouble!"

Abner laughed. Heat had melted the bowl of thin glass from around him. That was not an image beyond a pane, but Gil Weinsheimer, exasperated about something. Abner wanted to talk, now, because he was alive

for this moment, after two whole days without food, and the dream of enclosing glass was gone.

"That's your elaborate sense of honor, Gil. This worthy youth hadn't a scruple about turning on his uncles. He wanted a pair of sour old men for his damned book, and used what he had on hand. He's got no imagination, to speak of... But the whole thing's rather amusing. He's such a raw lump. He had his success, there, in 1922. He'd climbed into the paradise of an assured place in the literary columns. Then his next book was bad, and the third is awful. Tried to read some of it... Sweepings of everything. Even cribbed a bit of a poem of mine—a thing about a man fancying God as a streak of white light."

"I remember that," said Weinsheimer. "It was good."

Abner said, "It was just a compliment to Charlotte. We'd gone up to see her father and she was standing in the churchyard and this white dove flew past her face. In strong sunlight, you know. It was very pretty."

She looked up as she heard the wings, and then she smiled. Colors and lights pleased her. The world was a pretty frock she could put on.

"You've dropped Mrs. De Lima?" his friend asked slowly.

"Why . . . we dropped each other, Gil. See her now and then. Frankie's all right. But she suffers from her

virtues. She likes people, and her amazing friends are—tedious. She's very openhanded, and loyal. Her place is always full of retired bawds who have milliner's shops, and actors she knew in vaudeville. . . . I took Vincent Currey there once. He was boring me here. He was scared to death, like most of these would-be—literary—immoralists. A weird Englishman—a fellow named Boscommon—was singing some lewd cowboy songs and the hetæræ were laughing, and Currey was scared to death.''

'Hope his uncles make him clean pigpens,' said Weinsheimer.

"Don't blame him on me," Abner yawned; "I didn't make him, Gil. He was manufactured by some reviewers who thought it was daring realism to have a seduction occur in a livery stable. Parfum de fumier. . . . Literature is a parade of apes in a gallery lined with cracked mirrors. That's an epigram. Mark it, Horatio. Ever thought of getting drunk on hot milk? I'm dizzy as a top." He shut his eyes. "Oh, I'd something to tell you. Yes . . . Lamon's turned up."

"Glad of it. Good boy."

"Yes," said Abner, "but so damned hard to talk to, Gil."

"I never saw a person so afraid of being bored as you are."

Abner opened his eyes. Gratiano had brought in the thin lawyer's hat and coat. Weinsheimer wound a white scarf around his collar and then slowly hitched his arms into the coat as the Filipino held it for him. Gratiano backed into the dining-room, watching Weinsheimer's assumption of the tall hat. It needed two taps to strike the right angle. Gilbert Weinsheimer was now completed. He never said good night. His narrow feet pattered and glittered on the floor. His car's machinery hummed down in the street. His Irish wife would be waking for him on Park Avenue and his valet would be ready. He lived in musical preciseness and contemptuously looked at random, untidy people.

"You and Luis go to bed, Gratiano. Lots of breakfast for Mr. Lamon."

He sat and looked at the curtains, their edges curling in a wind. A hot drowsiness had come on him. Anything would do to watch, now, and anything would do to think of. He counted English stamps on the wrapped book at his side and observed a letter lifting from the desk when the wind was strong for a moment. He might as well read the letter. He tore its end and saw his father-in-law's script ragged on the page.

"I have dire tidings," said the Reverend Potter Sanford. "You had better take a fast steamer to Europe and hide yourself in the Pyrenees. Mrs. Cumberland, president of the Saint Margaret's Book and Art Club, bought a novel at your shop last week. She came to me with it and she means to go down to New York next week for the pleasure and Christian duty of seeing you in person about this outrage. I tried to suggest that the author and his publisher were more at fault in the matter but she wants your blood as well as theirs. A reference to a woman's umbilicus in the first chapter set her off. As she happens to be extremely obtuse a reference to perversion in an English school somewhat later in the story quite escaped her. But you will have trouble enough as it is. On the anniversary of Charlotte's death I was so busy with a quarrel between our new choirmaster and the tenor that I had no time for a little note to you. I do not think that it matters very much. Perhaps Charlotte would be amused at the idea of reminding you of her lovely existence. Do run up and see me soon and tell me the news of Bohemia. Always affectionately. . . . "

Abner opened a small drawer and dropped the letter into it. . . . I must go up there and see him. He enjoys hearing me talk. . . . How simply good so many people are! Good and amused. . . . Probably he has no definition of morality and the philosophers seem rather idiots to him, and all these noises like a fight among the choirboys in his churchyard. I must go up there once more. . . . Abner saw a pair of brown feet in sandals

of coarse straw on the floor to the left of his eyes — Now I must talk to you. What about?

- "Umbilicus is a stupid kind of word, isn't it?"
- "Yeh," said Lamon. "What's she mean?"
- "Navel. Bellybutton in the vulgar dialect."
- "Oh? Say, it's after two o'clock, Cousin Abner. Go to bed, for God's sake."

Abner improvised, "I shall in ten minutes. I have to look at this book. Very valuable. If I don't buy it, it has to go back directly to London."

Lamon looked suspiciously at the book in its wrapping of blue paper. He seemed to have a fear of books, handling them timidly and putting them back into cases hastily when he had frowned at their pages for a while.

- "Valuable?"
- "Very. Rare first edition. Where'd you get that bath-
 - "Los Angeles."
 - "Good-looking," Abner said.

It was, too. Soft folds of some white cloth swayed lazily from the cord wound tightly around Lamon's lean hips. He had this sense of the becoming. His clothes were always plain and good. That must be why Gilbert Weinsheimer approved of him. . . . Oh, go to bed! Don't make me talk to you!

"And what did you think of Los Angeles, Lamon?"

"I'd hate to tell you. . . . Had a good job up at Fresno. Assistant manager of this big fruit ranch. But they sold it to some damn Armenians. No, I hated Los Angeles. I'm a farmer for keeps, Cousin Abner."

He grinned. Muscles caught up heavy corners of his mouth. Inescapably Abner thought of sunshine on a brown wall. Some clever person had said that of Lamon's grin three years ago.

"You seem to have made a tremendous impression on Frankie De Lima. She telephoned at eleven or so. Wanted me to bring you around there to supper."

"Dunno how I could make an impression on her. She was impressin' her black-headed boy, there, when I was at her place. She was havin' a fight with him."

"The ineffable Costello Ryan? A sweetly pretty youth?"

"Sweetly pretty," Lamon said, "is about right. Who's he?"

"Grandson of an Irish furniture-maker in Broad Street. Frankie's been educating him a little."

Lamon rubbed his short nose with the back of a hand. His big eyes gleamed out from under thin eyebrows. He plainly was wanting to laugh.

"She an actress, Cousin Abner?"

"She was in vaudeville, I think. She's even been married. Her husband was a bit of an author. He died the

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other day and she got reminiscent and I've been looking for a book he dedicated to her. She'd forgotten the name of the thing and what it was all about, and I had the devil's time finding it for her."

"Could she remember the poor guy's name?"

"Oh, yes! He'd never divorced her. He was a Roman Catholic, and that oddity kept his memory green."

Lamon chuckled in his brown throat.

"Well, she's a good-lookin' girl. . . . Hey, Abner, would your bank take a little bit of an account?"

"How little?"

"Just a couple of hundred."

Abner picked up his pen.

"Don't argue about this. This is a birthday present. I'll give you five hundred to put in with it. And don't argue."

"Aw, Abner, no!"

"Don't be silly, Lamon. The town gets more expensive every morning. You'll be here some time — I hope — and the tax collectors leave me a lot of money. And don't bore me about it."

"Yeh, but -"

"Do be still!" said Abner. "Buy some gloves for Aunt Marian."

"Make it just two hundred, Abner. Five hundred's a lot of money."

"I can't alter the check."

"You're awful good, Abner," Lamon said.

"Stuff and nonsense. There. And remember to tell Luis what you want for meals. It'll do him good to have an appetite in the house. This ghastly medicine I have to take for my heart kills food for me."

"What about your heart?"

"Nothing serious. It's an irregularity. Comes on at night mostly," Abner lied, not looking up. "It's just uncomfortable, now and then."

"You don't look as bad as you did when I came in. Honest, you scared me."

Talk of something else.

"Did you stop off to see Uncle John on your way to Boston?"

"No. Just telephoned from Cleveland. These people I was with wanted to get there in a hurry. Haven't heard from father lately, have you, Cousin Abner?"

"I sent him some cigars at Christmas and had a note."

"About three lines long?"

"Just about."

"He ain't much of a letter writer," Lamon said; "God knows when I heard from him. Aunt Marian sends me the news. . . . You haven't seen him since 1916, have you? Not since you an' Cousin Charlotte came out to see us."

Oh, do go to bed! - Abner smiled, looking up.

"Uncle John rather scared me. He reminded me of a very handsome big bull, if you don't mind the comparison. Don't think he approved of me. Perhaps having a poet break out in the family upset him."

"Well, he don't go in for approvin' of anybody very much, Cousin Abner."

Abner asked soon, "Does that include you, Lamon?"

"I ain't kickin'. Aunt Marian thinks grandfather petted me too much. . . . Why, father's sort of—dunno how you'd put it—He ain't easy to live with. You can offend him without thinkin' about it. And he don't say what's wrong until it's too late to do anything about it. But I'm not kicking," Lamon said, fooling with the green check in one hand. "Same in lots of families, I guess."

Abner said, "Yes, of course. And there's an element of envy in it. You and grandfather were great friends, weren't you?"

"Yeh. Miss him like hell, too."

Lamon stared suddenly at the white ceiling. Blood hurried under his brown skin and the scars waned on his forehead. Abner saw that his eyes were wet. Then the scars were bright again. His gown swirled.

"Well, thanks an awful lot, Abner. G'night. You go to bed."

"Good night," said Abner and lay back in the chair as the straw sandals hissed on the stairs.

He did not talk as well as that three years ago. He grows up. He has his character and some tastes, and some grievances. He must have said some dry, shrewd thing to amuse Frankie or she looked at his body. Or his eyes. Maybe some girl will take charge of him while he's here. How long will he be here? . . . Six weeks the last time.

Abner's mind ticked. He was not drowsy, now. He cut the cords of the English parcel and undid an inner package with a letter laid flat on its yellow paper. . . . The firm of Mace and Glover, from Conduit Street, hoped that a price of ten pounds, five shillings, three pence did not seem excessive for this item, as only four hundred copies were printed in 1897 and these were mostly in private collections. Several copies were known to have been destroyed by the present Earl in 1914, at the time of his father's death. . . . It meant nothing. Abner uncovered the book and looked at its orange binding for a time without belief. They had found it after four years. . . . Here it was: The Swordsman. The title-page still had a wreath of mannered ivy leaves about the name and a satyr squatted under the words "by the Earl of Flint." London, 1897. Here it was. . . . His tongue was dry. The cool, heavy pages twisted in his fingers.

He had found it once in a bookshop on a low street of Southampton, on the last day of April in 1918. A tiny red-eyed bookseller kept walking after him around the shop, staring at an American officer who bought so many books. And then he had lost the play. Abner now turned the pages and made his memory come pouring. This gladiator was named Pertinax and he was invincible, of course, and the emperor - Nero? No, Claudius, sent for him to kill a new gladiator at a feast and some woman noticed him waiting in a hallway. There was a deal of plot to the affair. Here, this last scene but one. The swordsman broke into the garden of an old house at night. Here it was. The blind woman who kept the house and her grandson woke up and found him in the garden. Here. . . . He pressed down the pages and stared at Italian print:

THE OLD WOMAN - Your voice is cold.

THE BOY (pulling her cloak) — Grandmother, it is he. It is Pertinax. It is the swordsman, grandmother.

THE OLD WOMAN — That is why his voice is cold. How

many have you killed, Gaul?

PERTINAX — How many? I do not know. Why should you ask me this? Leave me alone here. I have killed ninety men, I think.

THE BOY — He killed ten men in Antioch at the games there.

PERTINAX — So I did. Valerius Asiaticus borrowed me from the emperor and sent me down to Antioch and I killed ten men there at the games. Let me be alone in this garden. Shall I give you money? See! (He drops a purse.)

THE OLD WOMAN - Your voice is cold as wind.

THE BOY (lifting his lamp) — He has scars on his arms, grandmother.

PERTINAX — Let me be alone here. It will be dawn soon

and the games commence at dawn.

THE OLD WOMAN — And you will kill yourself in this place. I keep the house for the emperor. It is his house. You will fall on your sword here in the garden and we shall be whipped to death because you are Pertinax and the emperor owns you.

PERTINAX (throwing aside his cloak) — I have no

sword upon me, old woman.

THE BOY — He has no sword, grandmother. (He speaks timidly.) Sir, how does it feel, at the games, when you have killed someone and they all shout and the great people throw down money, and everybody shouts for Pertinax? How does that feel?

PERTINAX — How does a fly feel, drowning in vinegar?

Let me be alone.

THE BOY - Come, grandmother.

THE OLD WOMAN — Go, child. (The boy goes slowly out, looking back at Pertinax.) You wish to die?

PERTINAX - Why do you say so?

THE OLD WOMAN — Because your voice is cold. Your voice is a wind with cold ashes blowing in it. And you have come into this garden where a woman is buried.

PERTINAX — Ha!

THE OLD WOMAN (lifting her lamp before her blind eyes) — There was a man from Gaul who owned this house in the time of Casar Tiberius. He offended the great Sejanus and he was slain here by the soldiers and his wife died with him and their dust is under this garden. Flowers come up out of them in spring.

(A long silence.)

PERTINAX — Are there still blue flowers in spring?

THE OLD WOMAN — The beds are soft with them. I bend down and feel them.

PERTINAX — Listen. There was a man who came down from Gaul and lived in this house with his wife and their

three children. She sat here in this garden and spun wool, wearing a blue gown because she was of Gaul. And she sang songs. She had two sons.

THE OLD WOMAN - So!

PERTINAX — The father talked too much to the biggest son. He would walk up and down here, and tell him how all things went wrong in the Senate and the boy listened, and went and told his friends what his father had said to him about the Senate and the emperor and the lord Sejanus. So one day there were soldiers at the gate. . . . Where is she buried?

THE OLD WOMAN — Child, I do not know.

PERTINAX — The children were sold as slaves.

THE OLD WOMAN — Was there a little girl?

PERTINAX — I think she died.

THE OLD WOMAN — And the other boy?

PERTINAX — The boys were sent to be swordsmen. Your emperor Tiberius had fifty swordsmen always in his house at Capri. Children, holding swords. Killing each other for an old man and his sluts to watch.

THE OLD WOMAN — This is how your brother died?

PERTINAX — His blood was a snake that crawled on a black pavement in Capri. (A long silence. The old woman speaks gently.)

THE OLD WOMAN — Child, she is asleep. She does not move about the house at night or cry. She is asleep among the gods.

PERTINAX — Gods! You believe in gods?

THE OLD WOMAN (simply) — Not the great gods, no. But there are little gods who live under the earth and send up flowers in spring. Because she sang so many songs, she is always asleep under the earth among the little gods. Kneel down and make your thanks to the little gods who are kind. She does not cry at night or beat upon the doors. There is silence in this house at night.

(She goes slowly into the house. Dawn has begun above the bare trees and the wall. Pertinax stands silent.

A distant bugle.)

PERTINAX — Gods! (After a while he kneels suddenly on the earth and speaks gravely and simply.) I lay my hands on the earth and make a supplication. . . . You little gods who dwell under the ground send up blue flowers and make the sunlight warm always in this garden. Send up many flowers. This is my supplication.

(He rises. Another bugle. The games have begun. He

stands silent and then speaks wildly.)

PERTINAX — Oh, when I am killed at last, when they pull me dead from the circus with their hooks — say, will your dust blow to meet mine?

(The third bugle. He picks up his cloak and goes out.)

Abner shut the book. . . . The mind enriches, he thought, piling colored salts on everything. This is our human essence, this wish to believe that we have seen greatness printed, our pain echoed and stamped in ink. It is not sentiment. It is a kind of barren demand on each other's wits, and we meet the demand ourselves by an architecture of colored salt. Precisely because I read this stuff with Gilbert's telegram in my pocket I covered it with meanings, stuck thoughts into the tricky cadences. This scene was the continuing yell of my pain. Any cry against death would have done just as well.

He struck a match and held it to the end of a cigarette. But his hands were quivering.

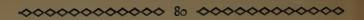
Indifference is not a possible condition, he thought. I shall lie to Lamon tomorrow at lunch and say that I had an engagement for dinner. I can't talk to him for

two meals in one day. No, the notion of indifference is absurd. Indifference to a lot of things is plausible in some man greatly occupied with a work — or a thought — or a lust. But indifference pure and simple is a delusion of inferior poets. . . . I have to go to bed.

But the puzzle of his condition kept him, the cigarette smoking in his fingers. He thought in the clarity of weariness without pictures or evasions. . . . She was simply a pretty woman, kind and gay-tempered. My mind can rip her in pieces, but I cannot destroy her. Everything returns on me, all her scents and gestures. This is the terror of the remembering mind. We see too clearly; our memories hold too much. Her hands turn up the earth in her father's garden and she whistles, planting violets in a warmer corner. . . . Indifference is not a possible condition. I am afraid of each day's tedium. Boredom is a form of terror. It filled monasteries once.

He put out the cigarette and walked down the room, turning out the lights fixed to naked white walls. The shape of the tall curtains diminished at the windows, but some glow of the streets came through the silk and he was not quite in darkness. Then a tripping noise, gently rattling, rose outside his house. It had begun to rain on the city and soon there was a smell of wetting earth between cracks of the stones below him.

Say, will your dust blow to meet mine?



CHAPTER V

THE desk in Lamon's pale bedroom was a little thing and his knees rubbed its bottom as he wrote, taking care of each sentence. When he finished the letter he left the desk with relief and went to read beside the windows.

Dear Aunt Marian: I am sending back your check because I do not need any money right now. I have got seven hundred deposited here in the Park Avenue Trust Company in which Cousin Abner banks and am going to get a job pretty quick. But you were certainly mighty good to think about sending me something. Thanks a lot. I guess my letter from Boston sounded kind of blue because I am certainly about as homesick as a man can get.

I got in here yesterday p.m. Abner was giving a big party and a lot of his ecenteric friends were here. He looks very bad. He is thin as a post and tells me he has some trouble with his heart but not very serious. He looks like he needed some kind of diet to build him up. The first person I saw when I got in yesterday was Bessie Parcher on a omnibus in Fifth Avenue. We talked some and shall look her up pretty soon. She is boarding just about four blocks from this house.

You have not got any idea how I hate New York City. I wish the Indians had not sold it for ten cents or a bottle of whisky to the Dutch. Please write me soon. Lots of love to everybody. Thank you again for the check.

Your loving nephew,

He wished that he had not put that in about looking up Bessie Parcher because Aunt Marian would tell fat Mrs. Parcher and Bessie might telephone him to come to tea or a meal. Lamon despised boarding houses. There were always thin women looking at you from corners and a clerk out of a bank beating the piano in the parlor and some hopeful women admiring him. And he knew nothing about Bessie Parcher. You probably could not say damn in front of the kid without scaring her. Her folks went to the Episcopal church in Zerbetta and her father did something in it - acted as treasurer or one of those jobs. Young Brickley Parcher had been expelled from high school last winter for being caught with a girl down in the furnace room. The Navy would be a comfortable place for young Brick. Well, it was too much to write the letter all over. Lamon sealed it up and carried it down to the white living-room, where Abner always had stamps in a bronze box on his desk. Gratiano was laying newspapers on a stand as Lamon came into the room. Having stamped his letter, he picked up a newspaper and looked for an amusement. Dinner would not be served until half past seven. Three hours to kill.

But the newspaper was stupid. A senator had made a speech. There had been a riot in France about something. A young writer, the heavy type said, had committed suicide. That would do to discuss with Abner. Lamon read about Mr. Vincent Currey, who had chucked himself under a train in the subway late last night. People leaving the theaters had been shocked by the sight and some women had fainted. The business occurred just at half past eleven. Mr. Currey's body had been identified by a friend, Mr. Todd Mathewson, this morning. Mr. Currey had left a letter at his friend's apartment. . . . Severe nervous strain. . . . He was twenty-eight years old. . . . North Amity, Pennsylvania. His novel of life in a small town had been one of the successes of 1922. . . . Wife had recently divorced him and was understood to be living abroad. Abner must know him. It would do to talk about at dinner or lunch. Lamon turned over to the sporting page. But that was stupid as the rest of the thing. Some damned fool of an artist showed a big sketch of Young Sheehan without any hair between his breasts and legs on him like an elephant. Young Sheehan was skinny below the knee. Lamon gave up the newspaper and went out to post his letter.

Miss Lambert was coming up the three white steps of the house as he banged the front door. As he could not dodge the long girl, he grinned at her.

"Abner in?"

"No. He's driven out to eat dinner with some folks in Greenwich. Won't be home until late, either."

"That's luck," she said in her chanting voice, beating a cane on the step; "I was going to warn him that Bill Peterson was coming up to bore him about a book. The child has evolved the bright idea that Abner ought to pay for having his book printed. No publisher wants the bloody thing."

"Why?"

"Oh, it's one of those solemn things on Christianity. Bill thinks that Christ is a purely erotic symbol. He says the figure was evolved by monastics and ladies in a high state of sexual tension. Asceticism plus carnality. Hence the white robes and the insistence on the nudity at the crucifixion. Dull, isn't it?"

"I guess it would be if I knew what you were talkin' about," said Lamon.

"You're refreshing. But it is stupid. I can't imagine where Bill got the idea, as he hasn't been abroad in two years and his ideas generally are marked, Made In France. Capital letters, please."

"But what's Cousin Abner got to do with it?"

"The function of the kind uncle to talent. — Do me a favor? Ask Abner in a casual way, some time, just how much money he's owed by the world of arts and letters. It's absurd and he ought to be restrained."

They walked westward together. Lamon puzzled a little.

"Abner's awful kind-hearted about money an' so on, I guess."

"Oh, much too much so! A minor Mæcenas. . . . You didn't run into my retired husband out in Los Angeles, did you?"

"I didn't know you were married!"

"Oh, absolutely! I still am married. Can't divorce him. My people would swoon. The Pope's staff would have to blossom before I'd be asked to meals again. His name's Randolph Thatcher. He has very big feet. Designs scenery for moving pictures," she said, "and rather well, too."

"I never heard you was married," Lamon repeated.
"You don't look married."

"My virginal lankness. We didn't have a baby. Randy's a nice chap, honestly, but he's depressing when he's drunk, and that's rather often. He's a converted Christian and they always make so much fuss about their gospels of freedom. He found a sympathetic ex-Quakeress and they sin together and I'm glad he's happy."

Her voice was a light kind of water endlessly running. Lamon was embarrassed by this lightness. He paused to light a cigarette on the corner of Park Avenue and sneezed his match out in a white gush from the sun above white buildings. "Do you ever get hit by a sense of New York's rather appalling richness? I'm decorating two new apartments along in here. Not one of my clients knows a chair from a table, really, but they've this money to spend. . . . Look at the damned street! You go up and down through layers of honey in elevators. It's hyper-Carthaginian! It's maudlin. . . . There goes a car worth twenty thousand dollars — and another just like it, neg au cul."

"I suppose it's a fine town," Lamon said. "Not for me."

"I've always been here," Miss Lambert said.

"Too bad."

"Don't you find the metropolis even a little amusing, Lamon?"

"No. Hardly any. Too much noise, for one thing, and it st — smells."

A policeman raised a hand. Cars became beasts of warm metal nosing into a bright rank all across the street. A lot of tired people looked out of the cars at people tired on foot walking in front of the metal noses. Then Lamon and Miss Lambert tramped past windows filled with funny Chinese jars and crystal dolls or past women's stuff hung on gilded crutches or past colored furniture in windows dressed as rooms. They stopped on the corner of Madison Avenue where bloody letters low on a window said, "Norah Lambert, Decorations." Miss

Lambert's shop had one frayed chair and a jaunty candlestick in an alcove of velvet.

"We've got a chair like that out home. My greatgrandfather fetched a lot of the stuff in the house from Boston."

"That's very early eighteenth century," said Miss Lambert.

"Cousin Charlotte — Abner's wife said we ought to be careful of it. Her folks in Hartford had some like it."

"Oh, you knew Mrs. Coe?"

"Yeh, Abner brought her and the kid out in 1916. Pretty girl."

"Delightfully pretty and damnably dull," said Miss Lambert.

"I dunno . . . I liked her. And there ain't so many smart people around at that. I was countin' up the intelligent people I've met in bed the other night and it didn't run to much," Lamon said; "I mean intelligent about everything."

"You're setting your mark high. Would you try me on my intelligence about cows and bees and butterflies?"

"Sure. What call," he asked, "have I got to set myself up for an intelligent man when I'm just damn dumb about books and things like that?" He hoped that he could remember everything Bob Temmer out in Seattle had said on this point and went on slowly, "Intelligence ain't a one-ended kind of thing. When you say intelligent, that means a lot. Cousin Abner was workin' out a problem in solid geometry for me, out at home, and talkin' to grandpop about the Civil War next minute and about manure to my father. That's bein' intelligent. I could tell you a lot about professional athletics, maybe, that you don't know or about bees, but you could stump me on a couple of million things."

"Aren't you confusing intelligence and information?"
"No," he said, "I ain't!"

"Well, we'll agree that Abner's intelligence is quite genuine, anyhow. I'm — What the devil are they looking at?"

A metal buzzard was trailing vapor from its tail as it sailed high above the street. No noise came down through the city's noises. The airplane floated northward and would soon make cows look up from pastures outside the stinking town.

"I hate those things," said Miss Lambert. "Ugh! The world's too small now but there's still a thrill in getting on a steamer for Trieste. When it's only overnight to Berlin, we'll have to fall back on thought for entertainment, or have blood transfusions from wild beasts."

Lamon grabbed a topic out of that lot of words hastily. She might get him back to talking about intelligence.

"Blood transfusin' is funny. They hitched my arm to this kid's arm in hospital over in France an' I didn't feel a thing. But I was weak as a cat all day.'

"Who was he? An old friend?"

"No. He was in an infantry regiment. He was all washed out. Been bleedin' in his pants clean down from the front. He'd been shot in the — the hip an' they didn't know it."

She stared at him.

"You mean you just impersonally presented a stranger with a gallon or so of blood? I'd have wanted a recommendation, first! He may have turned out an evangelist or a stockbroker."

"But you can't let a man die," said Lamon. "That ain't morals! You'd feel like a stinkin' dog afterwards!"

"That's a fair definition. Morals are what keep you from feeling like a stinking dog afterwards?"

"Yeh."

"Oh, do run along," she said; "you always disturb my mind!"

The trouble with Abner's gang was that they were always talking and that they used too many words. Most of them spoke too fast and they all just flickered from one thing to the next. Bob Temmer, who taught in a high school in Seattle, had squawked when Lamon told him names of some of these people and had asked what

they were like. Lamon wished that they were more interesting, and walked westward discontentedly.

He got into the big park without meaning to go there. Three years ago he had always been ending up in the park, this way, when he went for a walk. He hunted for a hollow where there were two dogwood-trees and a good slope of grass and found it after he had stopped to talk to a policeman riding a bay horse named Jim and had got rid of a Jewish streetwalker who wanted ten dollars and looked pretty sickly. One of the dogwood-trees was dead and the other had begun to shed its blossom on the slope of grass in a pepper of yellow spots. But it was nice, here, and sun came heavily on Lamon's face as he sat on the bench.

Two boys were pitching a ball to each other along the slope below the tree. They were brothers and the bigger one was a tall kid who kept bawling criticisms to the smaller boy. The younger one twisted himself up in knots as he pitched, flopping black hair about and wanting to be approved. It was kind of pathetic being that old; you wanted folks to approve of you.

Age makes a lot of difference, don't it? People are really scared of just time. I have been here longer than that kid. If he asked me a question he would be scared—a little—because I'm older than he is. They are scared of time. It don't matter any that father is no

bigger than I am. I'm stronger. I've got as much sense as he has. The time those bees mucked the hives up, grandpop told him I had more sense about bees than he had. But he is seventy years old. . . . My God! That is a long time.

Time was a gray movement in Lamon's mind. He had considered this before when he though how frightened he was of his father. He closed his eyes. . . . Suppose John Coe lived to be eighty. . . . I won't stay away from home all that time. Go home and be a hired man or work in Nick Schaeffer's store. . . . It's all silly, anyhow. Everybody knows he told me to leave. Might as well get on the train tonight and go. . . . No. . . . If I had a couple of thousand I could buy in with Nick. Somebody would make me a partner or a head man in a store on the square or something for a couple of thousand. . . . Won't go home with my tail between my legs like Button Ross did. . . . How did he get to be called Button? Oh, yeh. His umbilicus was funny-looking. Too big for him. Nice kid. . . . Weak mouth.

Two years is an awful time to be away from home. Ought to be married and settled down. . . .

I'd like about three kids. Two boys an' a girl.

Abner's kid got burned up with Cousin Charlotte. Too bad. He was a nice little kid.

His eyelids were orange shades between his mind and

the world. The boys yelled to each other for a while and then their voices stopped. A few people passed the bench, clattering heels on the path. One woman and two heavier walkers and someone with a cane. It would be time to go home and dress in a stiff shirt for dinner when there was no sun left.

He opened his eyes because a fly trotted down his nose, and saw the slope vacated and the dogwood-tree blowing a little. A woman in white strolled under its branches from the path at the top of the slope and came walking down with a patch of sun on her left hip. She was looking toward Lamon as she walked and he watched her happily, tall and swaying as her white shoes touched the green grass. Her shoes seemed wet. They were made of a white leather with a glaze on it, he saw. A wrinkled petal of dogwood hung to an ankle when she was standing on the hard path.

"Are you and Abner comin' to my party tonight?"

"Uh . . . Oh, hello," said Lamon and hunted his hat on his head. But it was lying on the bench at his side; "I dunno. Abner drove out to have dinner with some folks in Greenwich. I don't know when he'll be back, ma'am."

"What about you? I hope to God that Abner does come. I've got this Hungarian comin' to play the violin at half past ten and I'll bet he can't speak nothin' but

French. Nobody I ever heard of talks Hungarian," said Mrs. De Lima, settling on the dark bench, "except waiters. But musicians all talk French. This man's named Bela Kilar. I hope Abner comes. Can you talk French?"

"About ten words," Lamon said.

"Yes, and six of 'em dirty. I know soldier's French.

I was in Paris some in 1919. Well, you'll come tonight?"
"Want me to?"

"Of course," the fair woman said. "What the hell did I ask you for?"

There was this perfume swelling out of her, not strong at all and not like a flower's smell. It was more like a medicine grown faint and pleasant. They filled baths with salts that were like candies in colored bottles and soaked themselves in water steaming flavors. The perfume seemed to move upon his brown face.

"I'll come," he said.

"How did you get those scars? They're kind of becoming."

"We were comin' down the road to this creek. I was on a caisson. This shell went off right in the damn middle of the battery and killed about ten men and —"

"Quit talkin' about it," said Mrs. De Lima. "Shut up! It was a shell killed my kid brother. Jim Stiger wrote home about it."

She shrank all together on the bench, huddling her knees. Her breasts worked in her gown.

"What division was he in?"

"The Second Division. John Reichmann. And it served pop right. He's an Austrian and he hated the Germans and he let Johnny go. And he was the best-lookin' kid in this world, too. He was eighteen the day he was killed. . . . Served pop right. . . . Got a handkerchief? . . . What the hell good is a war, I ask you? . . . Thanks."

But her breasts were shivering bubbles in the white gown. Lamon took hold of her wrist and a bracelet of loose jewels hurt his palm. Her sobbing shook the perfume all around him. Then she grinned.

"Silly of me. . . . I was at April Clancy's funeral this mornin'. . . . A choir always gets my emotions stirred up."

"I hate funerals," said Lamon. "How many's in your family?"

"Oh, a lot of us. Me and Ed are twins. Then there's three girls. Then there's Bob. He's lame. He was playin' down in the freight-yard when he was a kid. Lost some of one foot. He works in Indianapolis. And then Estelle. She's Johnny's twin."

"That's a real family. I'm an only kid," said Lamon.

"So's Abner, ain't he? Are you first cousins, or how?"

"Firsts. Uncle Phil left home young and worked his way through college. He was a civil engineer. Built bridges and all that."

She said, blowing her nose, "But the differences in a family are funny. Now, take Ed's kids. He married a hen with money. And I mean hen. She just sets. They live in Chicago. His kids are so refined it's simply awful to be around with 'em. But Mary's — she's next to me—in Lima need a squad of special policemen and they think grammar's somethin' to eat. . . . You look like Abner some, though. Same kind of eyes."

"Thanks."

She took her wrist slowly from his fingers.

"You will come tonight?"

"I told you I would," he said.

"I wanted to be sure."

A cone of heat spun around him on the bench. Lamon grinned, opening his brown fingers on a knee. . . . I could kiss you and you'd let me.

"I'll be there."

"When did you leave Los Angeles?"

He closed his fingers, looking in her eyes.

"Los Angeles?"

She said, "You were standin' on a corner in Los Angeles on the — lemme think — ninth or tenth it must ha' been 'cause we left there the twelfth — It was the ninth

or tenth of October. You'd got your hat off. You were standin' on a corner in front of a drug store. I think you had on a light suit — gray — and a blue shirt. You were standing with an old man on this corner in front of a drug store."

"I came east to Boston in February. What were you doing in Los Angeles?"

She laughed in a heave of gay sounds.

"Oh, God! He thought he wanted to write a story for the moving pictures! So we went out. We was there ten days."

"I wish I'd seen you," Lamon said.

Her body rose from the bench. A very fat old man was toddling at her and Mrs. De Lima went three steps to meet him, through the hot sunshine.

"I thought you were in Europe. So nice to see you!"

The old man said in a fat voice that he had just landed from England and the weather had been terrible and that Mrs. De Lima was looking too superb. He picked up her hands and kissed their palms loudly.

"In this rag? Rot! I look nine million years old, Mr. Lewis!"

Mr. Lewis said that e'er ever the knightly years had gone to their grave she was a queen in Babylon and he was a Christian slave, and that she was always superb. He still held her hands. "You do know how to say nice things even when you don't mean a word of it. I'm glad you're home. If I killed the fool who made this dress you'd go to court for me, h'm? . . . You're a dear old thing. Au revoir."

Mr. Lewis went toddling on down the path in the sunlight and looked like a fat bear, in his brown clothes, putting one foot ahead of the other in a wriggling motion.

"He's about the best criminal lawyer in the city," she said. "He got Moira Dawn out of that mess she was in."

"What did Moira do?"

"Well, if you ask me, I think it was really blackmail, because she ain't got any more morals than a cat has. Oh, she's a nice girl an' all that, Lamon, but she's one of these people that do anything they damn well want to and don't see it ain't right. When they want a thing they go and do it."

"Sure. Lots of 'em, too. And that Lewis got her out of it?"

"I guess his maiden name was Levinsky. Yes. He got her out. I guess it cost her about fifty thousand, though."

"Ouch," said Lamon; "I'm a poor country boy. There ain't that much money in the world!"

She looked down at him.

"Fifty thousand is a lot, ain't it? . . . I was thinkin"

about it at April's funeral. Joe Cominsky paid for the funeral. God knows where her folks are . . . or who they are. Her real name was somethin' like Evans. She never took care of money. Owes me a couple of hundred right now, wherever she is. Nice girl. . . I don't have to fuss about money any more, and thank God! . . . Well, you'll be around tonight?''

Lamon grinned.

"You know I will."

"Honest?"

"You know I will."

Faint powder showed on her face but her lips were not painted. Her teeth came down over a lip.

"Quit lookin' at me, Lamon, or I'll cry or somethin'!"

"I'll shut my eyes," he said.

He shut his eyes. Her white shoes grated on the path swiftly, swiftly, and went hurrying away.

A sun was spinning over Lamon's head. He sat inside a cone of heat and let the sun drip down in a golden paste all over his face, and his hands opened and shut on his knees. Everything soft moved upon him and everything lifted a burning perfume into his nostrils, stiffening and loosing them. . . . He was going to have a good time.

On his fourteenth birthday he had been sitting on piled wood back of the house at home watching sunlight through his lashes as it fluttered in some blowing sassafras leaves and the young German cook came out of the kitchen with his birthday cake held high against the breast of her blue dress. She said, "Tonight we haf a good time. . . ." and smiled over the white cake as she put it on the step to cool and then stood scraping a smear of white sugar from her breast, always smiling, and heat softly dripped on him in a boiling sugar from the sun.

"I'm going to have a good time. . . ."

His eyelids were not orange any more. Lamon opened his eyes and saw a skinny moon tossed up above the blue park on a yellow sky. People went grinding past the bench on the hard pathway through cooling air as he sat grinning at the moon. When he stood up, an old man who was tall looked at him, walking by, and was like John Coe. A cold whip struck across Lamon's shoulders because the old man walked off, straight and tall under his wide hat. His belly winced for fear his father would come turning back and tell him to stay home tonight.

He's out home, though. . . . Try and stop me, father! I'm going to have a good time! You try and stop me. Try and stop me! What the hell do you care, anyhow? Try and stop me, you old—

What had cousin Abner meant about the element of envy?

Lamon stretched his arms in the dusk and watched the

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moon a while. . . . He's old and no good with women an' I'm young. . . . Try and stop me! Try and stop me! Hairs of gold light swarmed on high buildings south and west of the dark trees. Honey trickled from the

and west of the dark trees. Honey trickled from the windows. He could crush the combs in his hands and smell the honey.

Try and stop me, father!

CHAPTER VI

A BNER opened his eyes in a room lighted by pink lamps strung with dusty gilded lace. Violins sounded the beat of a dance somewhere under all this. The very tall man who was touching his naked shoulder nodded to him.

"It's all right. You fainted in your car, Mr. Coe. Drink some of this."

There was a taste of brandy in warm milk. Abner lay still in his glass bowl, and all colors and all sounds washed on the outside of the bubble, meaning nothing. If nothing came through the glass he might die again. This was how death felt. A drowse with no more I in it. He was not even hungry.

"I was dining here. Your driver had sense enough to bring you in, when he saw that you'd fainted. This is a hotel in New Rochelle."

The drawling voice came through the glass. Then Abner was annoyed by dim festoons of roses on the stale wallpaper and a wind trickled over the sill of a door as a waiter rolled a table in from the corridor.

"Ought-to be censor of decorations for hotels."

"A national censor or a censor appointed by the governors of the several states? . . . Ordered some hot soup when I saw you were waking up."

The waiter was a limp, small man. He approached Abner with a soup plate as if it were something sacramental. He brought the rolling table to the side of the bed, and solemnly stood back to watch the soup being eaten. Its steam was colored by the abominable pink lamps.

"I'm not hungry at all," said Abner. "Had some dinner in Greenwich."

"It's ten o'clock. Better eat something, Mr. Coe. I'm a doctor. I was dining here when they lugged you in. Your driver tells me you're not very well."

Luis and Gratiano, giving Michael his lunch in the kitchen, had told him that Abner did not eat anything. Abner yawned, wondering what Michael had babbled to the gigantic doctor. This was Dr. Joseph Henry, he remembered. You saw him at the best concerts, sitting with big hands locked in his lap, his eyes shut while the music lasted and his long legs cramped in the seats. He was famous for something. . . . A passion for soup took Abner. He tried not to eat, and was eating.

"Bad appetite?"

"Oh, rotten! I've been overworking. Suppose I didn't eat enough at Greenwich. The food was no good, anyhow. . . . This isn't bad."

"No. The food's not bad here. I have to come out every week. Cases at Dr. Bevan's sanatorium. Usually dine here."

His drawling, arrogant voice was all in a single tone. He stood lighting a cigarette and the match made rills of white hair glitter in his dull beard. His big nose arched against one of the pink lamps.

"May I drive you back to town, doctor?"

"Oh, thanks. I've my own car. I have to go back to the sanatorium for a moment. Who's your regular doctor?"

"Dr. Sidney Harper."

"Good man, too. Better drop in and see him. You're twenty pounds under your right weight, Mr. Coe."

Abner scraped some grains of soaked rice together on the bottom of the plate, and said, "I don't think it's that much, but I have been losing weight."

Dr. Henry walked off to the dressing-table and picked up a yellow book. He spun pages with a long thumb and blew smoke through his nostrils. The thick cigarette wavered in his lips for a while. Abner huddled rice together and ate the grains diligently.

"Who's this Casimir Paradis?"

"Oh, is that Les Possibilités? Had it in my car. . . . He's a Serbian or a Croat, or something mussy. Always writes in French. He lives in Paris."

"He's not bad," said the doctor. He translated slowly, "Among the greatest stupidities of mankind is the . . . belief . . . in the virility of athletes. One has known soldiers coated like sardine tins with medals for courage, boxers, wrestlers and heroes of . . . oh, yes . . . heroes of the bicycle races who had all the vanities and habits one associates with inferior women. . . . That's not bad observation for a damn novelist, you know."

"Isn't it?"

Dr. Henry said, past his cigarette, "No. I looked after a famous football captain. He wore silk underclothes and kept a mountain of scrapbooks with photographs of himself. He'd simply tear from the field to have his nails manicured every day. . . . Married three times and only consummated one marriage. Got three medals in France. Died of blood-poisoning from having a bad manicure on a railroad train. Pathetic chap. Very fine man in some ways. . . . Lots of effeminate kids turn 'emselves into athletes by sheer will-power."

Abner hid a yawn with his spoon, but it was time to say something.

"My wife had a second cousin who was a tennis champion. Cried like a girl when he lost a game. Used to darn his own socks at college. Disagreeable pup. He's some kind of clergyman, now."

Dr. Henry spun more pages and then richly chuckled.

"This isn't bad . . . I don't dare read French aloud. . . . 'The way to reduce a woman to submission is not by flatteries and gifts. You should pretend—instead—that everything about her interests you most intensely. Tell her that the new hat is deplorable. Agree with her—her mother-in-law that her friendship with the rich Madame X is a social mistake. Add up her check-book and insult her about her extravagances. She will end by giving you at least as many privileges as she gives her husband. . . .' That's not bad either. Had a patient who ran off with her chauffeur because he told her she couldn't drive the car.''

"Was she happy?"

"As happy as she was likely to be. Her husband's name should have been Legion. . . . Listen to this . . . 'Ask the average man to indicate what he considers a handsome fellow in the salon and . . . there is every chance that he will pick out a man whose appearance is an improvement on his own type. Thin Don Quixote shows you a bean garçon whose muscles fill his skin and who has a cocked mustache. The little blond man with an embonpoint points his finger at a blond boy whose stomach does not need repression. But the ladies, who have the right of improving their appearances to suit themselves, do not hunt such mirrors for their dead vanity. No woman chases a man who resembles her. Yet one constantly sees

men married to women who might be their sisters.'
Perfectly true and psychologically sound.'

Dad married a woman who looked like himself. Is that how types persist in families? . . . Have to speak, now. Abner said "Paradis had a mistress who ran off and lived with a prize-fighter. Seems to have come back to him. He married her last month It was in the French papers."

"I should imagine that a prize-fighter would be monotonous," said the doctor, spinning pages. "They always look dumb as dirt. Perhaps the French brand is more civilized. The last time I went to a prize-fight I sat next to your father. Fifteen years ago. You're the image of him."

"Think so? People always say so, anyhow. You knew him?"

"Lord, yes! Ever been in Zerbetta? . . . I was raised in the manse there, on Poplar Street. Dad was pastor of the Presbyterian church for a million years. Yes, I remember your father driving your grandfather's butter down to the station. That was an awful innovation of your grandfather's."

"What was?"

"Selling his butter straight to the hotels in Cleveland. It was a wily thought. Took the town atheist to think of such a trick on the middlemen. Yes, I remember Phil—your father—hanging around the square, watching them

put up a new brick building. Genesis of a famous engineer. . . . Is your uncle John still alive?"

"Very much so," Abner said.

He roused, lifting himself on the pillows of the soft bed. He was a little excited by that memory of his father, a long, tanned boy, watching them stick red bricks together in the dull town. Dr. Henry struck a match for a new cigarette.

"Your uncle made me about as mad once as anyone ever has. I was out there in 1905 or 1906. He'd brought his kid down town to get his hair cut. The little fellow went out of the barber s and got into a fight with another pup in the gutter. Mr. Coe spanked him too hard and then read him a lecture on etiquette. I tried to interfere. He was scaring the child to death. He always irritated me. I don't know why. Something sulky about him."

"I can imagine that he's hard to live with, doctor. Rather stiff. But grandfather was amusing."

Dr. Henry grinned.

"Old Lamon Coe did a lot to justify the superstition about the wise old farmer. He was wise. He fascinated my dad. They used to argue religions. I think dad had a faint hope—a pretty damned faint hope—he might convert Mr. Coe."

"I wonder how the family came to be irreligious?" Abner said.

"Lots of the old families out there were," Dr. Henry drawled. "The Duryeas were recanted Catholics. . . . Your grandfather told the dirtiest stories in Douglass County. His only rival was a hired man on the Ross place, named Francis Xavier Cashin. Heard the two of 'em have a competition once. . . . My childhood's full of beautiful memories. How do poor city-kids learn the facts of life? I saw one murder before I was twelve. Saw a public hanging in 1882. And fornication could be witnessed by any active kid down along the railroad tracks at night."

Abner laughed. Zerbetta came out of pieces in his mind and hung together as the doctor talked. He saw John Coe roaring at a little Lamon in the middle of all this.

"It's pretty country out there, doctor. Young Lamon—Uncle John's son—Lamon's staying with me in town, just now. . . . He really has a passion for the farm. Got eloquent about the squirrels in the trees down by the river at lunch today. He's rather an ugly fellow, like grandfather. But he got excited about the squirrels, you know, and he was handsome, as long as he was excited. Saint John Baptist preaching in the wilderness, you see? He gave me the natural history of squirrels and a sort of sonata on calves." Why am I talking so much? . . . He wants some more. "He's really rural. I can remember him weeding the garden out at the farm in 1916. Wouldn't

weed a garden for a million dollars. He and Charlotte—my wife—got confidential about weeding, and about what to do with moles, and why does the rose-bug flourish?"

"So as to fall off roses into your dessert," said the doctor. He was looking at Abner now. "Doesn't it ever occur to you city men that farmers love the country? After all's said and done they were brought up in it. They like it. I don't see why a farmer shouldn't appreciate a landscape and fresh air. I don't blame young Coe for liking your grandfather's place, either. It's all damned pretty on that side of the town, where the ground pitches down and the river's wide. I used to be out at the Ross place, next to your grandfather's, morning, noon and night. There's a patch of rocky ground in there close to the river. We pups used to lie around there half an afternoon and talk and swim and talk. And it comes back into my head whenever I hear a good conductor doing some justice to Mozart."

It had been hot down beside the little river and light dripped on Charlotte's neck in a string of beads through vines hung in a tree. . . . Abner shut his eyes but the image exploded in darkness. He said, "It is pretty," and heard the doctor spinning leaves again.

"Here's what I was looking for." He read, drawling, "L'homme... Mankind: a form of mammalia—sparsely covered with hair—differing from the other

animals in its extreme capacity for fear. . . .' And that's good, too.''

"Not so bad," Abner said.

"I think I must steal this book from you. I've got to go back to the sanatorium and talk to a case of intellectual suicide for a while. She can't sleep. This might amuse her."

"Oh, please take it! . . . And please tell me what you mean by an intellectual suicide."

I can sleep, he thought. I can always sleep.

"As far as I can classify them," said the doctor, "they're people who've got what this man calls an extreme capacity for fear. They may be physically brave as Hercules, but they've lost their power of resisting life to such a degree that they dread boredom all the time. It's an incessant fear of the next hour. . . . It's horrible, too. It's horrible because they're generally such charming people. But they've got past a philosophy, and they haven't enough hard self-conceit to make 'em want to go on. They're done with the possessive impulse. They're just not involved with anything except this fear of boring themselves. I don't want to mix you up with my professional jargon. Something has started them down the hill and they can't get back. They may not know they've started down. People seem to believe that all awful nervous shocks come in one lump. They don't. A man may

seem to resist—get over some calamity, but it crawls after him—years later."

"Interesting," Abner said. "Rare, isn't it?"

"Fairly. And sometimes they manage to die quietly. They're often very sensitive about their families. Fear of making a scandal and the rest of it. . . . This patient of mine tried to starve herself to death, but that's so painful in the first stages that they don't often go through with it."

Abner slowly yawned. "What do you try to do with them?"

"Oh," said the doctor, "you try palliatives. Tell 'em there's a beautiful range of mountains back of Albuquerque. And—Eh?"

Abner laughed.

"I was thinking of New Mexico this afternoon. They are beautiful mountains, too. Rode through the whole range in 1913. Extraordinary changes of color. They can be utterly black at sunset. . . . Beg pardon. I cut in on you."

"That's about all you can do," said the doctor; "you offer palliatives. It's not so bad when they're old, but you feel miserable when they're young. When a girl in her early twenties tells you that God must be an unknown mathematical principle and that success is a worse bore than failure, it gives you a chill."

Abner said, "The nonsense about success would sound rather bad, at that age. But lots of youngsters must think about God as an unknown mathematical principle. I did. I told a light lady all about it once when I was a junior in Harvard. Threw a box of candy at me and told me to get out of her rooms. It was on an awfully cold night, too."

"I wonder why kids always treat prostitutes as if they had intelligence? They always do. . . . A boy in his twenties shouldn't bore himself about gods, Mr. Coe. His whole intellectual approach to God ought to be something rash, like wondering whether a god who permits dandruff and a shortage of cash is a really nice god. One of my godsons came down from New Haven to raise a loan from me this morning, and he was pretty damned mad at God. God had been mean enough to let a girl loot his whole quarter's allowance, when he was drunk, the other night. He was thinking of taking up religion. That meant he was scared of his father. He was in the primitive stage of religion. He was scared of Jim. . . . I wrote Jim to send along an extra check and not to say why. It'd be awful to stand idle and see a good boy get religious," he drawled, "as religions go, these days. . . . Run around and see Sid Harper. You need a diet. . . . Good night."

The lower hall of the hotel was not well lighted and a

colored glow ran out from the door of a dancing-room as if it were a strip of shimmering thin silk laid on the tiles. Abner stood, settling his bill at the desk, and watched his driver beaming in this glow. Violins and a mad, driveling piano and a drum were making the people dance in there and Michael was staring at the pleasure of it so that his legs twitched in cases of black, slick leather and his cap swung on a thumb and his yellow head kept time. He was looking up a road to heaven. He wanted to be dancing. The music stopped but his head kept time for a while and his cap still swung in his hand as Abner came to him.

"Jesus, you had me scared, Mr. Coe! . . . I looked back in the car in Mamaroneck and you was all right—readin'. 'N then I looked in, then, an' thought you was dead or somethin'."

"Sorry I scared you, Michael. It must have been indigestion or something of the kind. . . . Leave the windows open. I'll need air. Glad you brought me in here. That was Dr. Joseph Henry. Very good man."

"Yeh? Well, you had me scared, sir."

It was such a clear night and there were not many cars on the roadways. Abner was sleepy on his cushions, whirling in his box past flares from cheap counters beside the streets where men ate sandwiches and cars stopped full of families. He was swimming through a space of air which meant nothing to his tired perception but that lamps were gay in windows and that he was slowly chilled by a breeze that sometimes tugged the robe across his knees. A hard blaze from some high lamp once hit two bars of metal in a shop's window, making a white angle, and he thought of God as an unknown piece of mathematic writing, a power to be determined, some time. The cigar weighed in his fingers. He wished to be in bed. His bowl of glass was shattered when he slept, and his mind beat in dreams.

An aurora came up from the city's crest. Then Michael brought the car slowly over a bridge and Abner saw the Harlem as a sliding shawl under him. A gang of lads stood down on the shore next to a failing bonfire, tinted by this low carnation of embers so close to dirty water. He shut his eyes and saw the low coals of his honeymoon's campfires in the hills behind Albuquerque. He got back lines of shadow, lines of light, and the sound of his guide and the cook singing quietly at night beside the fire. It seemed to be the top of a roadless incline. He looked upward, backwards to catch all this, the fire in silence and hands on his neck in silence and wind flowing everywhere upon the tent. . . .

"It's a fight," said Michael.

The car was penned in a street and people flickered all around. Men and women were lunged out of windows

and seemed brackets for their shadows flung up from them on the walls. Everything moved and shifted on the sidewalk about roaring policemen. Some man was shrieking against the roar and the clattering voices of children. Then the bluecoats made a space, flagstones showed, and here was this man swinging on weak legs, his arms stretched out at both sides and his wrists held to the officers by bright links. He was a bird with wings tipped in silver. He kept shrieking up, "Oh, Christ! Oh, Christ!" and his face was a horn's mouth screaming at the sky above this street.

"Hey," Michael asked a boy near the car, "what the

"Caught a fella on his wife."

"Yeh? Shoot him?"

"They're dead as hell."

The car went on and the street was placid after a moment of going. Some children romped in a hustle of pale shirts under a lamp and an old negro watched them, laughing at them, with a parcel shaking in his dark hands.

God, is this the end of me! I see it all through a thin glass and it means nothing save that shapes proceed and that lights alter on them. I see it all and I want nothing from it.

CHAPTER VII

THE difference between Mrs. De Lima's party and a party at Abner's house was that Abner's people just came in, but these people came into the silky room in a series of bangs. They crashed from the tall doorway across the rugs and all the women kissed Mrs. De Lima, in the curve of the golden piano. A woman in red clamped her arms around Mrs. De Lima and rocked her sideways, clawing her naked back with fat fingers.

"Oh, stop it, Jen," said Mrs. De Lima, getting loose. "Let's look at you. When did you get back from wherever you was?"

Jen became grave as a sucking calf and prodded Mrs. De Lima in the stomach with a finger.

"I was at the Scudderfield Rest Home, Frankie, and, honest, honey, any time you get the blues, you try it! They got the most remarkable healer, up there, and the food ain't bad, neither. But this healer is simply remarkable and he could walk straight on the stage and play Hamlet because he's got just that kind of a face. Kind of melancholy, see? And he gave me ten lessons for nothing, too. Said I interested him more than anybody he'd seen in a year. Ten lessons for nothing."

"What did you learn, Jen?"

"Well," said Jen, giving Lamon a look across the piano, "it was all about worry being the disease of the age, some of it, and how to free your personality from the shadows of self, some of it, and how fatuous society is. He says the road to freedom is through the extremes of expression, and a lot more. I'll tell you the next time you come to lunch. Did you go to April's funeral?"

"I went clear out to the cemetery."

Jen shrugged her heavy shoulders and shook her dyed

"Honest, you got more guts than I'd ever have. Cemeteries have always depressed me, ever since mamma went. And I have to avoid getting depressed. All there is to running a hatshop is just not being depressed, ever. Say, I got in some new stuff from Paris this morning. Come and have a look. You'd look sweet in two of 'em. . . . What kind of drinks is there?"

She went plowing through black coats and restless gowns toward the north end of the room. Mrs. De Lima told Lamon across her left shoulder, "If Jen would say no a couple of times a week when she saw a drink looking at her, she'd not have to go and take all these cures."

"Doesn't she go out to Los Angeles some?"

"Seen her out there? Yes, she's Amity Fuller's mother, you know. Goes out and sees the kid some. Amity can't

support her. She married that English boy that's always playing earls and stuff in the pictures. His folks all came over and live on Amity. She's silly about him, like girls get. She . . . Oh, hello, Ed! Your show over as early as this? Say, I'm as mad as two wet hens. Had this Hungarian violin man coming to play and he hasn't turned up yet. I've been telephoning him all over hell and gone. They say your new show's sour.''

She walked down the room with the thin man, pleasantly talking. Lamon rested his elbows on the golden piano and watched the tall woman grow small. This room was monstrous. It had four windows open behind flutters of silk curtain on the western side, and people wandering Fifth Avenue must hear all this chatter. He wondered if the curtains let bodies show through them and what anybody going past made of his shadow. He had been standing here, looking at Frankie's back for half an hour, watching it dimple and seem to swell when she moved suddenly in greeting somebody. There was a little clasp of blue jewels at the back of her neck, holding the string of pearls together, and this blue glint still showed as she stood by the table against the north wall with her thin actor. . . . I'm going to have a good time. . . . But he was a little scared of her in this room with people jabbering around her and the women making a fuss.

"They've altered our cat," a girl told him, at his side.
"He was going out at night all the time and we had him altered and now he just sits around the house and doesn't do a damn thing."

"Spoiled his ambition?"

"I think you're cute," she said, hitching against the piano. She put down a bubbling glass carefully and wiped hands on the front of her white dress. "I asked Frankie to introduce us and she said, 'You go plumb to hell, sister.' So I'm talking to you, just to annoy her, and it don't mean a damn thing. Want a ticket for my opening night? . . . You needn't come before nine o'clock 'cause I don't do my first dance until about quarter after nine."

"I'll come about five minutes after nine," Lamon said. He thought this must be Moira Dawn and wondered how she looked so pretty in the theater. Here she was thin and sallow and her eyes were colorless even with blue paint clotted in the lashes. She frowned at the top of the piano.

"I hate pessimists," she said; "I hate 'em. What I want is to make the public art conscious. I was telling one of those men I want to make the public art-conscious and he says you can't because the public reads the pop'lar magazines and they don't know what art is. He says art's the fine line between perm'nent and imperm'nent

expression. He's a piece of tripe, I think. I told him so. His name's Smith. . . . What's life all about, anyhow?"

"I don't know," said Lamon.

"That's just it," she said; "nobody knows! You get born an' grow up and all that kind of thing, and where does it get you? No place! And the priest keeps tellin' you that God's kind, my child, and—and there's nothing in it, is there? Oh, absolutely!"

She put a finger in the wine and then licked drops from a red nail.

"I want to make the public art-conscious. Art is the pursuit of rhythm. You see that, don't you? Pursuit of rhythm. A man told me that and he's a Russian and they know all that kind of thing because they're Russians. And this man named Smith says that pessimism is a natural component of art. Only he's a piece of tripe. . . . I bet you're a prize-fighter. A man—down there with the sandwiches—this man damned well said you looked like a prize-fighter. I said I'd come and ask you."

"You tell him I'm an engine driver," Lamon said, "out of a job."

"Are you out of a job? Well, you go round to Joe Cominsky's office an' if they won't let you see him, you say Moira Dawn sent you."

"Thanks a lot."

"An' don't you be pessimistic," Miss Dawn ordered,

"'cause it don't get you any place. The big things in life all go to people—see what I mean—go to people that get in rhythm. Rhythm is the big thing in life. Here comes Frankie. I like her a lot. She's vulgar but she isn't envious. She don't say things about people. I mean, she don't say the kind of things some girls say."

Mrs. De Lima smiled across the piano and spread her hands flashing on the golden wood.

"You'll be in a fine state for a rehearsal tomorrow, Moira!"

She means that, he thought. She is kind. Lots of them are.

"I'm going home in one minute. We had our cat altered an' now he just sits around the house and doesn't do a damned thing," Miss Dawn said carefully. "Spoiled his ambition for him. Engine driver, you go get me my coat. It's in Frankie's bedroom. On her bed. It's a pink rag with spots on it . . . crescents. Do you know what a crescent is?"

"Sure. It's a moon that ain't ripe yet," Lamon told her and heard laughter begin as he walked away.

Women had this habit of laughing at things he said without meaning to make a joke. He used to think he must be funny, but it was not that. It certainly was not that. If he looked stupid, as his father said he did, perhaps they were surprised when he said something sen-

sible. Bessie Parcher on the omnibus had said, "You say such idiotic things." But the kid meant that he was funny. . . . He trotted up the green stone steps and a mirror met him almost at the top. Lamon paused to fool with his tie a minute and looked at himself in the glass under a lamp made of crystal balls. . . . I don't look so dumb. Bright eyes. . . . He saw a maid smiling at him in a doorway and smiled at her.

"Hey, which is Fr — Mrs. De Lima's room?"
"This way, sir."

The room was a tent of silks with a whole sky of vellow silk through which bulbs were blurs of light. He picked up a pink cloak with black crescents on it from the bed's silver coverlet and stood a moment, scared by a sound like a thick sigh. Wind, getting through the open windows, lifted the silks briskly and everything trembled, the sky shook over him, the silver coverlet shook. A handkerchief blew on red and white tiles in the bathroom beyond a sheet of spangled gauze making a door. . . . Hate to see the place in a blizzard. No smell. . . . But the maid was still smiling at him. Lamon took the pink cloak on his arm and trotted down the stairs. Some men looked up at him from the hall, white-breasted robins peeking up at a tree. He walked past them and found that Miss Dawn had sat down on a stool beside the piano.

"Look at Frankie's drum, engineer! She can play it, too! Can't you, Frankie? She's a talented slob. She can play it to beat —'

"Quit swearin', Moira. Captain Coe'll think you're coarse."

Lamon blushed over his promotion and looked at the tall drum under the piano. Its sides were coated with red plush and had a stamped device — coat of arms, they called the thing — fading on the round. It was really a drum. The black sticks were thrust through cords on the side and the top sounded out promptly when Miss Dawn touched it with a palm.

"Abner gave it to me for Christmas last year."

"Abner did?"

"Yes, I told him I played the drum in Fagan's Gay Girls once, and he sent me that for a joke. It's English. Some regiment or other that fought at Waterloo, against the French."

"I hate the French," said Miss Dawn, getting into her cloak. "They invented caviar."

"Caviar's Russian, Moira."

"I don't care. If the Russians had it first, the damn French took it from them. . . . I'm goin', now. You come and see me, captain, or I'll be annoyed with you."

She smiled very prettily at him and her voice refined

itself as some men and women came scuttling to see her down the hallway. Frankie chuckled, her fingers twisted in the pearls where they were colorless against her white gown. Lamon wanted to catch her hands and stood feeling his neck heat. He was not scared when she was close to his sleeve.

"Didn't think it was her. She's good-lookin on the stage."

"Oh, she is, now, Lamon! She's got a beautiful body!"

"Thin," he said.

"Has to be fashionable, Lamon. Had any supper?"

"I don't want any. Come and talk to me."

"All right. One minute. Got to be polite, honey."

There was a tiny door into the purple room with the pillows and the hanging lamp. . . . Now! . . . When she turned under the lamp, Lamon tossed an arm around her and began kissing her mouth. All of this woman swung in against him for three breaths and then struggled back.

"Quit it, Lamon! . . . Please!"

He took two cigarettes from a table and lighted both of them in his mouth. Frankie De Lima blew smoke from her nostrils and looked up at the beads of the lamp. But her breath whirled the smoke about and her eyes were wet.

"I could break that Hungarian's neck. Gets his check in advance and then don't show up!"

"When'll this gang start goin'?"

"Oh . . . I can't turn 'em out yet, Lamon. But damn that Hungarian! I wonder if he has the nerve to think I just handed him over six hundred dollars to shine his shoes with? . . . We let foreigners walk on us in this country too much. It's a shame!"

She left the cigarette in her mouth and passed both hands over the hair bound in closely around her head, watching the lamp. Lamon moved at her. But her head shook and she slipped through the door into the hall, smiling over an arm. She hid herself in the party.

It was funny. A man and a girl were in a room and nobody knew what happened before she went out to talk to people. Lamon raised a wrist to a cube of glass, a clear sugar lump in the medley of he lamp. It looked cool but it was hot. . . He thought, suddenly, that she was like Bessie Parcher. . . . Funny, and what of it? . . . He was going to have a good time in an hour or so. He fixed his black tie and went back into the big room.

"A civilization," a man told a girl, "is the next stage beyond a culture period. You see, a culture is all the things that lead up to a civilization. So a civilization and a culture aren't the same thing." **♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦**

"I see how you mean," said the girl, and looked at Lamon.

Lamon scouted along a side of the room and examined trays piled with sandwiches and hot dishes filled with creamy things in which peppers and olives and truffles were chopped. Masses of food lay on a long table of vellow stone, its legs shaped as naked women rising from spools of gilded wood. Frankie's butler was gravely pouring champagne into three glasses on a silver tray and a sweating waiter whisked these off into the corner where Jen in her red dress was laughing with two young men—Jen was the kind of woman who told kids stories in corners at these parties, about famous people she had known when she was young. She was like Mrs. Bill Selover, out at home, who knew the worst about everybody's folks for forty years and was good company when you weren't dancing. . . . I saw Jen out in Hollywood in a big car with a lot of people and I hadn't a dollar on me. Here we are. . . . But if you got thinking how crazy things were, you got a headache. Lamon ate a sandwich and walked up the room again. Frankie had fixed herself in a curve of the piano and looked at him from her safe place, past two black coats. She looked at him so hard that one of the men turned to see what she was looking at. Lamon stepped back and landed near a green bowl on a little high table filled with

chocolates. He ate four chocolates and Frankie sent the men away.

"Don't look so cross."

"When'll this gang get out of here?"

"Have you ever been married, Lamon?"

"Hell, no! I ain't got any money an' I never thought serious about it."

"I didn't think you had. . . . Your hair's curlier than Abner's. Isn't he the nicest kind of a fellow?"

"Yeh. How long you've known Abner?"

She said, "Oh . . . year before last. I ain't civilized enough for him. But he's awfully nice to me. He's sweet. . . . Called my bedroom Armida's bower. I looked her up in a book and that's one way of being complimentary. I was scared to tell him I didn't know what he was talkin' about."

"Oh, I just ask him," said Lamon. "He knows I never went to college."

"Why didn't you? Couldn't your folks send you?"
"Sure, but my father didn't want to. What's that

Sure, but my father didn't want to. What's that comin' in?"

A man covered with clothes came in the high doors. His clothes were not different from any man's black and white as he walked slowly over the rugs, but he seemed to be dressed in some strange way. His shirt gleamed more and his coat was blacker than other coats. He had

an eyeglass in his pale face and his white hair was smooth as a crust of flour on his head. Being very tall he bent down to take her hands and the whole top of his head glittered. Lamon was alarmed.

"I didn't expect you, Boscommon."

"Going to ring and have your man show me out, my girl?"

"Don't be silly... This is Captain Coe — Mr. Hector Boscommon... And this is Mr. Costello Ryan, Lamon," she went suddenly on, leaning back in her curve of gold, her voice angry. "Hello, Costello."

A slim fellow had come just behind Mr. Hector Boscommon. He jerked his black head at Lamon while Mr. Boscommon was saying that he was delighted, in his deep English voice. Then there was the littlest pause.

"You've been hanging more silk in here, Frankie," Mr. Boscommon said, and stirred an elbow toward the windows. "That won't do. Crowds the place."

"I like it."

"Right. But it won't do and it's stuffy."

"Honest, you're a holy terror! He walks into a girl's place," she said to Lamon, "and tells her what he wants hung up or took out! If I didn't love you, you old fool, I'd be sore."

Beautiful as if he had been drawn with a pencil, Mr. Costello Ryan stood glaring at the woman. Lamon saw

that the kid was so mad he could cry any minute. He was like a dark girl without breasts or hips, he was so pretty. Sweetly pretty, Abner said. Lamon wondered if he shaved and if his mouth was sore where Frankie hit him last night.

"Frankie," said Mr. Hector Boscommon, "a lot of wretched drapery's dangerous and some night, you know, a chap who's been drinking will chuck a match in your curtains and you'll have a whole mob in hospital." He made this sound important and his voice deeply continued, "I knew it to happen in Monterey in the eighties. This giddy widow had so much drapery in the place that it was like a shop. . . . A chap who'd quarreled with her set the place afire one night. Everyone knew he murdered her. But her place took fire and went up quite gloriously, and as her curtains had been set on fire before, you see, nobody could say anything."

"You're full of cheerful thoughts, Boscommon. . . . Lamon, any time you want a rest from me, just sling a match in the curtains."

Lamon nodded because he did not want to speak. He nodded and grinned. In this next silence, Mr. Hector Boscommon shed his glass from an eye into a palm and began to polish it on his cuff. Mr. Costello Ryan showed three white teeth on his lower lip. . . . People down

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the room were watching all this but nobody came up over the rugs. The silence ended.

"How did you get such a mania for silk, Frankie?"

"Always been crazy about it."

She was letting pearls leak by inches through her fingers and smiling at Mr. Boscommon. Something was going on, and nothing was being said. Lamon ate a chappolate. She did look like Bessie Parcher.

'I say, Costello, do run and tell them I'd like a brandy and soda."

Mr. Ryan said, "All right!" loudly and spun. As he walked down the room his hair shone and his heels glittered because he strode so quickly into the crowd.

"It's no use, Boscommon."

"Might one see you alone for a moment?"

"No," Frankie said, "one might not. Don't you leave, Lamon."

Costello Ryan was getting down the room but girls stopped him and a man flashed teeth shaking hands with the boy. Lamon thought that women had lifted their voices for this fellow. A fan made of green plumes began tossing in a corner from a girl's hand.

"Aren't you being just a trifle abrupt, Frankie?"

"Honest," she said, "nobody'd ever think you was ever a cowboy, Boscommon! He was a cow-puncher, Lamon." Lamon did not see why Mr. Boscommon shouldn't have been a cowboy. He would look all right on a horse and he still had no belly. Lots of young men in this room had bellies coming forward at you. So he said, "I dunno why not, honey."

Mr. Boscommon grinned and said, "There were hundreds of youngsters from England on the ranches forty years ago. Do you know California, Mr. Coe?"

"Some. Fresno and Los Angeles."

"Ah? I've a place near Salinas. My bit of paradise. I'll be on my way out there the end of next week." Everything he said was important, but he did not speak loudly, and he spoke kindly. He went on, "Frankie's always so amazed that I was a cow-puncher when I was a lad. I assure you, my dear, that it's not at all hard to ride a horse and look after some cattle."

"Cows always scare me," she said, trickling her pearls; "I milked one, one time. I think it's kind of indecent. I wanted to say, 'Excuse me,' to her."

She was talking carefully. Lamon heard the care in her voice and knew that she was angry inside her gown of white stuff without colors, because her hands moved without meaning to stir.

"Aren't you being a bit cruel?"

"Boscommon, you ought to be an ambassador or one of those kind of people. I ain't being cruel. You tell him to—"

"I say, Frankie! He's only a jealous kid, you know? You mustn't —"

"Don't try it again! I just ain't interested in him any more."

The tall Englishman said at once, "My dear girl, if that's how you feel, I shan t bore you about it at all, you see. But he's dreadfully sorry he was such a damned nuisance and — he's frightfully fond of you."

Of course they were talking about Mr. Costello Ryan, who was drinking something between two bright gowns at the other end of the room in a ring of people.

"I'm just not interested in Costello any more, Boscommon. . . You say you're going out west next week?"

"The end of next week, I hope. Heaven never meant me for a nursery governess, Frankie. If you're through with Costello, I'll see he doesn't annoy you. I'm very sorry, because you've been most awfully good to him."

Lamon slipped around the piano. From the doorway he saw that Mr. Boscommon was leaning close to her on gilded wood and sipping from a glass. . . . He was the pretty boy's lawyer or an old friend who was trying to get him back with Frankie, and Lamon stood beyond the doors watching the man's mouth twitch in dumb words. Something cold whirled in Lamon's throat. But it was not a long while before Mr. Boscommon brought

up his shoulders in a slow shrug, and drank heavily from his tall glass. Then he touched her arm and went sauntering down pale rugs into the party. Lamon walked back.

"Who's 'at fella, honey?"

"He's their manager. Ryan Brothers. . . . Here, Lamon. Keep away a minute. . . . That kid's badtempered. Don't let's have any —'

"Sure. . . . Make 'em all go home, can't you?"

"You're a silly baby, too. . . . Half an hour."

Lamon found some big cigarettes muddled together like white sticks in a silver bowl near the green staircase and smoked two of them. But all the air in this place crept smoking and hot at his nostrils and he was wet under his arms. Voices had no meaning, out here, and in there he could not get close enough to her with the pretty kid ready to cry his anger and make a fuss about things, and all the women watching what happened from under their lashes, and the white-breasted robins hopping around. He opened the bronze door and walked on the stone platform under bare lights that showed just one boy in uniform left. But cars were lined across the street in a rank of twenty, and the drivers walked along with each other, talking fretfully in this coolness of the night. Some of them turned faces to look at Lamon smoking his cigarette and one voice came in clear words through the quiet, saying, "He's a big fella, ain't he?" in a pleasant way. For all they knew he was a millionaire.

He could see the park when he walked to the eastern end of the stone platform. Now that it was warm enough there would be hundreds of men with girls on benches half of the night. There were two people side by side on the wall of the park and the lamps of a cab showed that the girl was small against her boy's shoulder. . . . Out in Zerbetta you could sit on the low wall of the Presbyterian churchyard in Poplar Street, under lots of thick trees, and wait for a girl to come walking past from the square. Poplar Street ran out as a lane among small farms until it ended in a wire fence at the tracks a mile from town. . . Lamon stamped on his cigarette. Well, he was going to have a good time first, and then he must get a job and work hard. He did not want to think about Zerbetta. That was the wise thing. But it would be hell when summer washed all the coats off workmen in this town and everything stunk of sweat, and the bay had no wind to send through the streets. Don't think about it. . . . Two men came through the bronze door. The boy in uniform ran to be spoken to, and then bawled into the street, "Mr. Boscommon's car! Ready!" as he dropped some coin in his pocket. Lamon was glad to be thirty feet from the two black coats.

"There's a party at Jim Farrell's."

"That's quite nonsense," said Mr. Boscommon, rubbing his glass on his handkerchief. "You'll go home to bed, like a good chap. And —"

"I more or less told Jim I'd come."

"You'll more or less do no such thing, Costello. I'll drop you at your place and you'll turn in."

"You go to hell," said Costello Ryan.

He stepped down from the stone wharf and his heels made a loud noise under the hollow of the ceiling while he walked five paces into the street. A car slid past Lamon and hissed as it stopped to take in Mr. Boscommon's important hat. It was a wonderful machine, made of black metals and shining all over as if it had just been licked by a cow. It passed Mr. Costello Ryan before the boy got to the corner and then slowed, but went on northward, as the pretty fellow turned sharply to the south. Then there was nothing to be looked at except the lovers on the wall of the park. Lamon found the bronze door unlocked and walked back into the smoke of the hallway.

Just when he was abreast the green stairs, a big chattering and laughing of women swelled up in the white room ahead of him. A heavy sound rubbed through the noise and startled Lamon because it was like the grumble of a drum being patted. Everybody was crowding near

the gold piano and Frankie was hidden by bodies. He heard her speaking.

"... and six of us used to open the act, see? And then there was a couple of song numbers an' Stella Vezey played the violin. She was good, too! Remember her, Ed?"

"The big girl that sang in Joe Blair's shows?"

"Yes. But she used to play the violin. Never knew she could sing a note. She was at some party in Buffalo one night an' they were all singing and a man told her to take a chance at having her voice trained," said Frankie. "Say, I haven't seen her in God knows when. She was a damn good trouper. What's become of her, Ed?"

"She married a Dago contractor. . . . I bet you can't play a drum, Frankie! You're bragging."

"Listen to me.... Here, Ronald, gimme those sticks. Now, watch the boss drummer of Fagan's Gay Girls!"

She was heaved suddenly out of the crowd with the red drum swaying against her gown and the black strap cutting her breast. She laughed at Lamon over heads, standing on a bench with light flung in her eyes from the lamps made of crystals. And then the drum sputtered out a gush of little sounds. Light fluttered on the hurrying sticks in her hands. A girl clapped palms on her ears and backed from the sound of the drum. Tumult came up

from the pounded skin and Lamon's blood jumped with the bumping noise.

"How's that; Ed!"

"You win! . . . Stop it! You'll wake the whole —"

"Listen to this!"

She banged both sticks together on the pale moon of the drumhead and let the sound go. And then she was beating the long roll, and the noises ran after each other all through the smoke in a great bustle of percussions that seemed a constant cry of many boys.

"Stop it, Frankie!"

She was hammering all these people away from her white dress in the flood of the drum. She was beating them out of there, and grinning over them at him. Her arms flickered like white skin of a frog's belly in the smoke and she bent backwards with the drum clutched in her knees. A glitter showed on her shoulders and her face was flushed. The drum poured its anger at the lamp quivering near her and the crystals seemed to wriggle in a fright of the noise.

"Bedtime, girls an' boys!"

"Oh, Frankie, quit!"

"Bedtime . . . Good night, all!"

She shouted through the turmoil of the shivering drum. All at once the air was cooler in the room. A girl went wilting close by Lamon's sleeve. The drum was a

shell blowing bodies past him, and faces laughed, and some man slapped his shoulder. Everything scuttled and hustled out of the white room, and Frankie sat down on the bench with her breasts quivering against the black strap.

"God, I ain't done that in ten years!"

Lamon walked up to her and lifted the strap over her head. He was so drowned in the noise that it had not stopped in his ears, and he stared at her moving lips to see what she was saying.

"One way of bustin' up a party! Get me some champagne. Half a glass, honey. . . . Kiss me once. . . . Get me a drink . . . I ain't done that in ten years!"

He rambled down the bared room and hurt his hip on a chair. The drum had scared him and his hands hunted a clean glass among the bottles clumsily and wine slopped his fingers. He felt impotent and loose in the light streaked by a few slow vines of smoke climbing from cigarettes on trays.

"I ain't done that in ten years, Lamon. . . . My God, I used to do that twelve times a week! I'm tired as a dead cat. Thanks. Sit down."

Her head was sleek on his shoulder. Lamon held the glass to her lips and the wine made a new smell in his nostrils. People were still talking in the hall and the curtains shifted as air came through the four windows.

"I love you."

"Oh, wait a minute! . . . I'm thirsty."

"I'm tellin' you I love you!"

"Oh, wait a minute, Lamon! . . . I suppose some of 'em'll be mad."

She put her glass down on the still drum and Lamon drew her back into his arms, then saw the gray butler standing at their feet.

"A Mr. Kilar, ma'am. He says he was engaged to play the violin this —"

"Oh, he's come, has he? . . . All right, Grady! I'll see him. . . . Come on, Lamon!"

Lamon, swinging after her body into the hallway, saw a fair man, very pink, with a greasy boy behind him who lugged a cased violin and some rolled music. The woman cried out, "There you are! You was to be here at ten o'clock. Go on and tell me your manager mixed the —"

"Madame, I am so sorry, but also I was engaged to play chez Madame Hobart on the Park Avenue, at nine o'clock. I was so much detained that . . . Pardon?"

"All right! You're here, now! . . . The piano's right in there. Run along upstairs, Lamon. Go on. . . . You go in there, you damned liar, and play for an hour. Play to beat hell!" She stamped on the stairs. "Go on an' play for an hour. I paid you! Come on, Lamon. . . . You go in there and play!"

But this music was not wasted in the empty room, because a light wind pelted the city and the curtains shook apart to let the sound of a violin become a whip in air above the street. It was a lashing scream, aspiring to be heard. It wound its power around a fat old man upon an omnibus and he thought of supper in Vienna, of black caviar in grains on a frosty silver tray and of wine twinkling in a colored glass under a lamp beside his mother's arm on a red table. This music swept across the street and was a rope that curled about the necks of two young lovers who had quarreled, so that their mouths drew together in a tremulous kiss.

CHAPTER VIII

HECTOR BOSCOMMON often wondered why people did not hear what his mind was saying as he talked to them. Once when he was buying some real Gobelin tapestry for Ryan Brothers from a woman in Paris she had known what he was thinking and suddenly yelled and suddenly spat on the floor between them. But he now stood in tight, new shoes and watched Mrs. Delmay Hobart fingering the ivory basket, while his mind said: "You poor frayed crumb, what on earth ever possessed you to fancy yourself as a woman of taste?" And yet he liked her because she was so bred and so endlessly courteous.

"It is charming, Mr. Boscommon."

"Isn't it? It came wandering in last week and, you know, I'm almost sure that it's one I saw in San Francisco when I was a lad. I used to go up to San Francisco, and poke about in Chinatown. I can remember so well one of these baskets — they're really rare in that form — in a window on Grant Avenue. It fascinated me. I couldn't buy it. Hadn't a tenth of the price. But I've never forgotten it, and I'm sure this is its brother."

He had the blank sensation of having spoken the truth aloud and ran his palm over the lace of thin ivory, carved as a net of thin strands in this oval not a foot long. All the nerves whispered up his arms; textures and ancient wood and the flesh of jade and ivory spoke to Boscommon through his palms.

"You've the most tremendous memory, haven't you?"

"I have," he said, still letting his mind loose; "Mr. Julius Ryan — the founder of this business — sent me abroad in 1892 to buy some things. I'd persuaded him to take in some antiques. I can remember every item I bought for him. I've seen them all since then and I know them as old friends."

"You've always been here, haven't you?"

"Since 1888. Mr. Ryan had just moved his shop up to Twenty-third Street. He had a sign in the window, 'Boy Wanted.' An extremely hungry lad from California, Boscommon by name, saw the sign and walked into the shop, and has been here ever since."

Mrs. Delmay Hobart said, "That's fascinating! I must tell mamma that. She's so afraid of you, ever since you bullied her about the tapestries at Tuxedo. I fancy you're the only person who ever called her an idiot and survived, Mr. Boscommon. It took an Englishman to do it."

"I remember that," he said, lightly, playing with his

eyeglass. "Tapestries she'd picked up in Paris from some swindler, weren't they? Yes, of course."

He sometimes thought of writing an essay on insolence as a paying principle. It had always been a paying principle, he believed, and he had amused himself with printed tales of impertinent royal mistresses, dandies and adventurers. But Mrs. Delmay Hobart was fingering the basket.

"I'm dreadfully poor. Been giving little concerts all winter and I'm in a fearful state at the bank. If I took this dear thing, could I pay for it next month or the month after?"

"My dear child! Pay us when you like!"

"Thanks ever so much," she said, and flushed a little.

Mr. Boscommon lifted a hand. One of the salesmen came trotting up with a pad and pencil. The great Mr. Boscommon declaimed, murmurously, "To Mrs. Delmay Hobart, St. James, Long Island. Send by messenger. Specially wrapped. . . . Get the lift up for Mrs. Hobart, Ransom . . . I must say good day. My train's at five o'clock."

"You're going away?"

"My place in California. Je suis en route pour le ciel. Mrs. Boscommon's been out there a month."

"I hope you have a good rest," the nice young woman

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said, and gave him a thin hand, on the lip of the opened elevator. It closed.

Mr. Boscommon spun on a heel and faced the salesman, throwing his deepest voice in the man's face.

"Now, Ransom, you've been in this department three years, and I put you here because you showed symptoms of intelligence. That was Mrs. Delmay Hobart — the Mrs. Delmay Hobart, if you like, and you were letting her wander around as if she was a cow. Where's your memory? You've seen her with me in here a hundred times. I'm disgusted with you."

He walked down the black carpets through the shimmering of old furnitures and was intensely sorry for young Ransom, a good boy enough, and rather clever. In his small paneled white office he picked up the telephone and said to it, "Mr. Lee, please. . . . Lee? . . . There's a lad who shows off pianos on your floor. His name is Todd Mathewson. Tell him his pay is raised ten dollars a week and send him up to me directly."

"But he's no good, Mr. Boscom --"

"Really?"

"No," said the head of the third floor, "he's inattentive and he don't play the popular —"

"Just why do you undertake to question my judgment, Lee?"

That would do for the third floor. Hector Boscommon

locked his desk with a tiny key, the smallest in a bunch hanging to a long chain of white gold. His secretary looked at him with timid eyes from her table in a corner and he thought, "You poor sheep. I hope that some decent man marries you and doesn't just take you and leave you."

"Mrs. De Lima called up while you were out in the salesrooms, sir."

"Really? Any message?"

"She wanted you to call her, if you could."

"Get her, please, Miss Gunther."

Men with red barrows were dragging bags of cement on the terrace opposing these high windows. The new building across Fifth Avenue had amused him for a month, but now senseless flourishes of bad stonework and ranges of stupid stone urns were criminally appearing everywhere on the receding steps of the monster. It would be terrible, next winter. He shook his head, and privily tried to shift his toes inside one shoe.

"Mrs. De Lima, sir."

Frankie said in the telephone, "Look here!"

"I know, my girl."

"Well, all right. But send for the police or do somethin' about him, Boscommon. Make him act civilized.
. . . He's been phoning here two or three times a day all week."

"As bad as that? . . . Oh, thanks for sending that fellow in to look at rugs, Frankie. Mailed you a bit of a commission on the deal just now."

"You're a sweet old lamb, Boscommon. But do something, honey."

"My dear child," he said, "I'll try."

A badly dressed, dark fellow came into the white room and stood trying not to look nervous near the desk. The great Mr. Boscommon set aside the telephone and chucked Costello Ryan from his head.

"Now, Mathewson, I've only a minute for you. I was at supper with Mark Walling last night. Tells me you've written a musical satire and that he'll produce it in September."

"Yes - sir."

Good boy. Hates to say, Sir.

"Congratulations. Walling's as decent a manager as there is in America. But he's got some tricks you should know about. He doesn't actually care about the theater in the slightest. All he wants is to put on shows where his talent for scenery can have a good time. He'll spend a fortune on your piece — he was chattering about the scenery last night — but he won't know if the orchestra's playing properly and he'll pick faces rather than voices. Take all your troubles to his nephew, that chap Bernamer. Bernamer's decently educated and a cynical lad.

He can handle Walling for you. . . . I've been up and down the theatrical business, you know, for forty years. I've known the whole gang, ever since they took to having real rugs and real chairs on the stage. . . . Now, don't lose your head. Don't give up your job here, and don't count an egg in the basket until your show's been running a month. And run along. I'm very busy. Good luck."

"Thanks a lot."

"Nonsense. Run along," said the great Mr. Boscommon.

Mr. Mathewson went out of the white office. Miss Gunther looked reverently at Mr. Boscommon with her cow's eyes.

"Send down a note to Mr. Grady to raise Todd—two D's, please — Todd Mathewson's pay ten dollars — make it fifteen dollars. Send down a note to those wretched fools in the publicity office that Mathewson's had a musical satire on American history accepted by Mark Walling. Tell them not to use that until the show's really advertised for opening. . . . And that's quite everything."

Costello Ryan slammed in through the door.

Mr. Boscommon lifted a cigarette to his mouth and stood while Miss Gunther wisely flickered out of the room and the white door closed completely behind her.

Then he said, "Can't you be a little less theatrical, Costello?"

"Have you seen her?"

"Costello, I'm not a pimp. It happens that I introduced you to Frankie. I shan't bother with this silly business any further. It's all over and you might quite as well bite on the bullet, my lad, and find some other girl. . . And you'll stop telephoning to her place. Frankie turns us in forty or fifty thousand a year, here. Sent her my check for three hundred just now."

"It is not all over! It is not all over!"

Boscommon let smoke pass through his nostrils. He thought wearily that his destiny had been to spend most of his life nursing these asses who were always hot about some woman or other and couldn't keep her when they had her. This whelp was just the second Julius Ryan over again, but less a man. Costello thrashed his legs from a black chair and batted his white knuckles on its arm. The sound throbbed distressfully in the warm room.

"My dear fellow, why don't you look at the thing reasonably? You're only twenty-two and Frankie's in her thirties somewhere. My word! She was Jack Fagan's girl when you were in short trousers! Her gang have probably been chaffing her about baby tending, and —"

"He's been there every night this week!"

"How do you know?"

Costello said, "Detective. Ted Keenan got him for me. . . . That man's been there every night —"

"You young ass! Have you committed the final absurdity of setting a detective on Mrs. De Lima?"

He wondered where he had picked up that sentence. It came straight from a book or a play. But it visibly bit for a moment. Costello's moist face reddened. He sat still in the chair and then spoke as madly as before.

"You don't know how I feel about this! She --"

"She's got a beautiful body. I saw her almost naked once. When she was Bill Evart's girl. She came down to supper, up there, in just a gauze shirt. Evart liked to show her off. She's a beautiful woman and she's jolly, and all the rest of it. . . . You'll have forgotten her in two years."

"That fellow's been there every night this last week! He's stayin' with a man named Coe. They're cousins. Coe has a house in —"

"Precisely so. He's Abner Coe's cousin. He's a Westerner. Coe's father was. There's a deal of money in that family, Costello. This chap's taken her fancy. He looks a brute. They were at La Cigale last night. Came in as Mr. Walling and I went out. . . . I tell you it's all over. Chuck it and go abroad."

Costello lay in the chair. His dampened shirt hung to his chest and his flat nipples showed as brown flakes on the silk. Mr. Boscommon despised him and stood looking peacefully at him. Ambrose Ryan was dull but he was not common. This was just their father all over again, but not a man. He was strong as a stevedore, hard as nails, but he was not male. Julius Ryan had been a fool about his girls but in another way, ferociously and inconveniently in another way. This ass would make a screaming scene in some restaurant unless he was checked. His father had punched men's heads. . . . Oh, hell! Here it came! Costello's hands went sliding up his face, and then the sobs banged in the little white room. The second Julius Ryan would never have done that.

Mr. Boscommon walked down the long floor of the salesroom and entered a blue office where Ambrose Ryan loyally pretended to be president of Ryan Brothers, with silver loving-cups and photographs of polo teams and the real tiger's head from India to cheer him up while he made mistakes in every policy for his master to correct. Monsignor Ryan rose from a chair beside his good nephew and tendered a pink hand to the manager of Ryan Brothers with his guarded smile.

"I'm so glad you've dropped in, monsignor. There's some work for you in my room. Costello's behaving badly."

The handsome priest lifted his shoulders in a man-ofthe-worldly shrug. He could not pretend much with Mr. Boscommon, who remembered him deviling his father for money as a schoolboy in 1890 and knew that a girl had sent him to bed for some weeks in those days. His shrug was an admission of all that.

"You've been very good in this business, Ambrose tells me, Hector."

"I've tried to make him take it sensibly, monsignor. She's a nice sort of woman. I pay her commissions on business sent in here. She has fine qualities."

"Ah, so many of them have! So many of them have," said Monsignor Ryan.

He was already playing a cardinal. His voice had the placidity of one of God's princes, raised far above earth in becoming clothes. He plainly trailed a red robe out of the room. It was the most superb exit. Hector Boscommon remembered him whining to old Julius Ryan to be allowed to go on the stage in 1889.

"Is C drunk, Uncle Hector?" Ambrose asked, rubbing his tanned fists on his desk, his nice nose all wrinkled up in the torment of trying to think.

"No, just tearful, Ambrose."

Mr. Boscommon threw off greatness and sat down beside one of the three people he loved, without illusions about the fine man in the chair. Ambrose Ryan had risen to being a good captain of infantry in France and had stopped just there. Everything that happened — his

wife's tempers, his success in polo, his brother's asininities and the behavior of his babies — was a rebuke or a compliment from a commanding officer named God. He now said, "God knows what I can do with the poor fool," and looked at Mr. Boscommon as God's lieutenant.

"Take him abroad."

"He won't come. I was going over in July, you know? Alice wants to run over. He's being awf'ly young about it, isn't he?"

"He's your father all over again, old man."

Ambrose nodded his curly head and scrubbed the desk.

"That was what Uncle Jim was saying just now. I can't remember much about father, of course. Mother had us abroad so much. He gave her a bad time, I know. I don't remember."

"You wouldn't, old man. Yes, this is Julius Ryan all over again. . . . There's a difference. I'm going to hurt your feelings a bit. I know you're fond of C. But your father was amusing and good-tempered. C just isn't. He's lewd."

"Oh!"

"Lewd. Your mother should have sent him to a Catholic school where they'd have thrown the fear of hell into him. My fault she didn't, too. I wanted him to

meet civilized people and advised St. Paul's, because you did so well there. I thought C would be rather like you, Ambrose — good at sports and all that."

"He is a damned good swimmer, Uncle Hector," Ambrose weakly put in.

"Yes, a lot of erotics are," Boscommon said. "It's a luxurious sensation. . . . Now, old man, we mustn't have some absurd scene in a restaurant with Frankie's new beau. We mustn't for two reasons. He's a cousin of Abner Coe. Coe—"

"I've met him at Norah Lambert's," Ambrose said; "Abner Coe, I mean."

"Right. It's where you'd meet him. He's literary. Runs around with all that lot. He has this chap stopping with him, Costello says. If there's some silly scrap, the bad news will get into that literary lot. You'll have funny paragraphs in the weeklies and what not. C will never hear the end of it and, what's more, this fellow would thrash him to a frazzle. He's six foot one or two. Has shoulders like a stallion. An ugly devil. . . . You must get C abroad. I'm serious about this. He's not civilized, and something about Frankie took him badly."

Ambrose scrubbed the desk. An idea appeared in his face.

[&]quot;You couldn't take him out to Salinas?"

[&]quot;No. C does not like me. You've always called me

Uncle Hector. He never does. I thought of that, but he would not come."

I would not have him near Genevieve for a million. She's just the age to be smitten with that kind of face. Girls like the type. Romance. Big eyes.

"God knows," Ambrose said, "where the Ryan family would be without you."

"Don't say that again, Ambrose!"

"I'll say it as often as I damn please," said Ambrose.

Mr. Boscommon was outrageously moved and his throat clotted full. It was like old Julius sending for him when the priest had fluttered out of the death-room and they were hunting the bars for young Julius, and Ambrose was an unborn globe inside his whimpering mother. Thirty years ago. This month.

"It's a superfluous topic. I've got to run. My train's at five. . . . Take the line with Costello that he's being absurd, old man. . . . And he is! We're civilized people! He's behaving like a damned cow-puncher. Worse, too. . . . There's no excuse, Ambrose. She's not his first girl, nor second, nor third. I can remember crying my head loose, when I was sixteen, over a little slut in Monterey the winter I went to school there. Dad bought himself a bar in Monterey on credit and made a fizzle of it. But Costello's too bad, really. We can't have this sort of thing. It's not civilized, my dear boy."

"Uncle Hector, how did you get your — your taste and all that?"

"I don't know. When I was a kid my notion of elegance was the yellow plush furniture in the foreman's house on one of the Miller and Lux ranches near us. I dare say Dr. Henry or one of these robber-baron psychologists who charge you ten thousand dollars to find out why you hate baked apples could root it out of me. . . . I like beauty, old man. I like to compare object with object. I've always been willing to learn. Picked up a lot from a drunken Englishman who painted chairs for your grandfather. He was something with a past. I like beauty," said Mr. Boscommon, "and order and good manners. I like civilization. Always did. My father was a good-humored loafer. My mother was God knows what. I can't remember . . . Ambrose, life's a masquerade. I don't mean that in any hypocritical way. It's a masquerade. We have to pretend to be something a little better than we are, or we won't be anything - not a thing. It's discipline. It's - goodness. And Costello's not got it in him. Do try to pound some sense into his head. He's stupid, but that's no reason why he shouldn't behave himself. God knows my poor wife's the dullest woman living, but she's the best mother going. Hector and Genevieve adore her."

"She's awf'ly nice," said Ambrose.

"She is. Grace doesn't even mind my eyeglass. There's no reason why Costello shouldn't learn some self-control, Ambrose. If I were you, I'd punch his silly head for him. You could do it."

"You're a great man," Ambrose said.

"Don't be an ass. I'll be back, at the latest, on the first of July. Wire me instantly if anything goes wrong, and try what you can do with C."

They shook hands, hard, and Mr. Boscommon went out of the office. He became the great Mr. Boscommon as he rang for the elevator to take him down, although his feet hurt hotly. An extremely pink page opened the machine's door and asked presently, "All the way down, sir?" in a voice new from England.

"All the way. New, aren't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Just off the steamer?"

"Yes, sir. Two weeks. And you're just off it your-self, sir."

"No, I've been years in this country," said Mr. Boscommon, looking at the distinguished Englishman in gray flannel, sliding down beside him in the frame of a long mirror. The cage stopped at the second floor and two ladies admired him for a moment, and then he was admired all the way down the floor to the front doors of Ryan Brothers, and out to his car.

Perhaps he had some English blood in him that made him go so smoothly through the job of being the English manager of Ryan Brothers. He often read about racial traits cropping out in a third generation or so, and thought it damned nonsense. His big, stupid son was American as any lad in Leland Stanford University and would be like Ambrose, a gentleman — and did not know a painting from a lithograph. Genevieve had taken fire from his brains, and the boy was like poor Grace.

I can stand stupid people who are good, he thought. My God, I can even stand Grace! She's civilized. I shall choke up when Hec meets me at Oakland. I wonder if I'm not really fonder of him than Genevieve. . . . No. She's the one. I'll have her come on here next winter for a little longer. . . . There's nothing Dutch in either of them. I wonder who the devil mother was. Ought to have asked dad about her. Too shaken up when he was dying. . . My God, what a trip west that was! Snowed-in ten hours in Colorado. Railroads have come on since '93. . . . Poor dad. Good, even when he was drunk.

His valet had ranged the luggage excellently in his stateroom and his slippers and a silk gown were ready. Mr. Boscommon shut himself up with his bruised feet and sat down to put his eyeglass to bed in a leather box

filled with cuff links, chains and scarfpins. He rubbed some lotion on the scar of the glass around his left eye and then unlocked the case with his papers and traveling library. The train moved. He considered a French novel and a new thing on philosophy and then picked out his Bible. A large dose of Psalms would send him asleep. He wanted a nap before they brought in his dinner at eight. Mr. Boscommon set his watch an hour ahead and began to read a long Psalm patiently. When he turned its first page, he saw his own handwriting on the top of the next: "Hector Boesenkamp, December 10, 1884." . . . That was the winter dad had the job at Salinas, tending cows for old Murgatroyd. I wonder who owns that farm, now. . . . He would ride over with Hector one afternoon and find out. As he thought about Hector, and the horses, and the hills like great low pillows of changing silk, Mr. Boscommon began to smile, and soon he laughed to himself because he was out of his greatness for a whole month, and could ride a horse in the sun.

CHAPTER IX

FRANKIE said, "When I was little I thought silk was the grandest thing in the world. Aunt Florrie was a dressmaker and she'd give me pieces of silk for runnin' errands after school. I had a whole box full of them. But that's how I lost my immortal soul. 'Cause I wanted a whole dress made out of white silk and I told that to a kid in the dry-goods store, and he started me out for hell. He fetched me four yards of silk. . . . Only I wasn't any good lyin', Lamon. I hadn't thought about tellin' mamma where I got it, and she asked me and all I could think of was to say Aunt Florrie gave it to me, and — oh! — how that didn't work!"

"And then what happened?"

Frankie grinned, lighting her cigarette.

"Nothin' much. His father thrashed him. Mamma scolded me to beat time. But nobody knew. . . . I love silk, though! Gee, I think a good white silk's the prettiest thing in the world."

She was sitting on her bed and she lifted an arm to the folds of white silk hanging as useless curtains on either side of the dented pillows. A straight band of

light was steady on her breasts until she dropped the arm again and lay back from the glow, blinking in her smoke.

"And then what happened?"

"Oh, I went to Saint Louis to stay with papa's sister— Aunt Minna. I went to high school there. And I got going with a couple of girls and their gang was too tough for a poor little country girl. They ran with some boys that worked on newspapers— printers an' so on. And I'd sneak out at night and we'd go places. And then I got married."

"How old was you when that happened?"

"Fifteen. He was a reporter on a paper. He was a nice boy, too, but he was awful religious. He'd read me all about the saints when I was cooking supper. He wrote a book about how much the Cath'lics did for America. I guess it was all right, but it was kind of dull for me. Religious people always kind of scare me, anyhow, Lamon. . . . You do look nice in blue clothes."

"Then what happened?"

"Oh, I ran off with a Jewish kid that's father owned a garage. It was all right. He was going to college in Chicago, but his folks made a fuss and wouldn't hand him enough money to keep me comfortable. So I found out the poor guy had been sellin' his rings to keep me pretty. And I went and got a job in a store."

"What did you sell, honey?"

"Silk. I was damn good at it, too," she said, swinging a foot; "I can sell things like a streak, Lame. I could run a big store if I had to. I bet I could. I was at the silk counter four or five months in Sheehan's."

"And then what happened?"

"Say, what is this game? Are you goin' to write a book about me? . . . I became an abandoned female and went into vaudeville."

Lamon laughed and finished smoothing his hair. He sat at the wide table, playing with silver things on a tray made of some funny wood in which the grain curled to and fro like a snake trickling in sand along the edge of the water, out at home. Curtains made the windows high shapes of yellow glow and the light stirred everywhere when wind blew a little. This cavern of silk had only two spots of plain wall, around the door and around the mouth of the closet. Everywhere else was thin stuff, swaying when winds came into the room and murmuring in the darkness as if air moved on long grass.

"Where's this you're goin' tonight, sweetheart?"

"Oh God, it'll be dreary! Out to Rye. Old Sally Moran. She's married to an actor with money. They live out there. She's awful fond of me. Knew her in Chicago. She's a sweet kind of woman but she's not much fun. Y'know," Frankie said, sitting up, "men

are awful damn fools. Now, all the newspaper crowd in Chicago thought a lot of Sally Moran. They said she was smart — profound and all that. She'd have five or six drinks and then she'd get kind of melancholy and say, 'Boys, life's mysterious, isn't it?' If she got real drunk she recited poetry — miles of it. Her father was an actor. The newspaper boys thought she was grand — deep and so on. If she's deep, I'm an ocean.''

He chuckled and went over to put a blue knee on the bed.

"I got to scold you about somethin'."

"Oo, what's poor little Frankie done, Lamon?"

"She went an' put some money in Lamon's bank for him. Lamon's cross."

"Oh, shut up!"

"No, honey. I wrote a check for you. Here it is back. Thanks a lot."

Frankie struck his hand aside and said, breathing fast, "Don't be silly, Lamon. You been payin' for lunches and stuff—and you're poor. Aw, please, Lamon! . . . You're tired of me, then!"

"Don't be a damn fool! But I won't take money off you. Not if I hadn't any. Put this back in your bank, and don't try it again."

"You're tired of me!"

"I ain't."

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"Honest?"

"I love you more every minute."

She had crawled up him and her lips were in his left ear.

"Honest, Lamon?"

"Honest, sweetheart. I love you an awful lot."

"Honest, Lamon?"

"Honest, dear."

He doubled the check into one of her hands. Frankie snuffled and rubbed her chin on his head.

"Well, you're awful silly, Lame."

He said, "Gee! When I got knocked out in Los Angeles, last fall, an' that damn manager threw me, I just didn't have a cent and a girl named Fanny Hutton gave me fifty to pay my rent at the house an' I felt like a dog with no tail until I got it back to her. And she was mean about it, an' told folks she was keepin' me. . . . Don't you ever tell Abner I was fightin', Frankie. He'd be — well, mortified."

"I can't get over Abner and you being cousins!"

"Well, you better practice and maybe you will."

She laughed in his ear and scrambled off the bed. Her white pyjamas tripped her and she hung to a Chinese chair for a moment, wriggling a naked foot. Sunlight showed on her hair, twisted around her head in a band of some silvery cloth.

"You can go home. I got to get a bath and get dressed. Sally's husband'll be here at five to drive me out. I'll be back tomorrow afternoon."

"S'pose I borrowed Abner's car and came out and got you?"

Frankie was loosening her hair in front of the mirror. She said through the pale drift of fallen braid, "No. Don't. Sally wouldn't like it. She's respectable, now. It'd make her feel bad about me. I'm not goin' to tell her about you."

"Respectable, is she?"

"Sure. . . . She thinks she used to be awful bad. Some women are like that."

"But she wouldn't know that we -- "

"Sure she would,' said Frankie, smiling at him; "I couldn't hide it. She'd know."

When her voice was soft, this way, something ached in his middle and he loved her a lot more. Lamon went over and kissed her on the eyes, feeling quiet and a little sad. He wanted so to say something fine about her being good to him that he said nothing, and kissed her eyes ten times.

"Love me, Lamon?"

"Aw, Frankie!"

"Well, you oughtn't to, 'cause I'm a bad girl and I'm going to hell," she said; "Costello Ryan told me so. He

was drunk and he got talkin' religious. He's the biggest baby I ever saw!"

"You ain't a bad girl, Frankie."

"I dunno," she said, "but what you're right, honey. You go home and play marbles. I got to get dressed."

She put her arms around his waist and held her face on his heart for a moment, then shoved him loose and yawned at the mirror.

"What do you wear those pyjama things for?"

"Oh, they're nice to lie around in, afternoons."

"Gee, I hate 'em! Had to wear 'em in hospital, in France. I hate wearin' things in bed."

"That's just 'cause you' know you're good-lookin' naked. Go home."

"I'm goin'. I'll be around tomorrow night."

"You'd better, or I'll send a policeman for you,

Fifth Avenue was full of scuttling cars that dashed up ugly spray from a few pools close to gutters, for there had been a rainstorm at noon, and Lamon had wetted his coat coming to lunch. The heat of the morning was not gone but stayed in air as a weight, and some workingmen trudged with jackets tossed back from a thumb over blue shirts. Lamon strolled and was gloomy.

As soon as he got out of her place he was in New York and it maddened him at once with the grunting of horns

on cars and the smell of people. This was June but you would not know it. Smoke and gas gave the Park's trees a grime; riders in the Park were pale on their languid horses. It was not June at all. He walked slowly and thought back to Frankie, braiding her hair. . . . She was like a tent, holding his mind inside, keeping the city outside. . . . His thoughts were rags with long spaces between their comings. She kept him from thinking much. That was it. That was it. . . . I ought to get a job. She's bad for me. I'm wasting time. . . . Can't help it. Can't help it.

Last night a man named Farrell gave a dance in a house he had fixed on the top of a great building and the city poured its lights all around the dark bottom of the tower's four sides. Frankie wrapped a cork in silver foil and everybody packed at the railing to watch the silver bobbing down. This had seemed wonderful because lights flowed up on her white frock and her naked arms. But it was silly now, just a cork falling and blowing down to a street. And the other day they drove in the woman named Jen's car down Long Island and saw what this ape who owned it called a farm, with two sad cows and just one dog, and nothing but grass on four acres of pretty good land, and a fool swimming-pool set around with vines, which anybody else would have trimmed until they came to something real. . . . That night he

dreamed that John Coe had cut the farm up and was setting out cubes of plaster cottages like the cheap houses in Los Angeles clean up the slope of land to the Parcher fence. He could not see his father, but Lamon roared in the dream to John Coe to stop all this, and Frankie was cross at being waked, and tears had come out of Lamon's eyes into the pillow.

An empty hearse went up Fifth Avenue. It meant luck to see an empty hearse. Lamon spat in the gutter — that was part of getting the luck — and wondered what would happen. Maybe Frankie's friend in Rye would telephone that she was ill and he would be sent for to come back and play. Or there might be good news from Aunt Marian when he got to the house. . . . I wonder why I believe in lucky signs? It's all nonsense. Picked up a bent pin with its point to me the day I got decorated in France, and it ought to've been bad luck. Saw a new moon through glass in the bathhouse in Santa Monica the week before Conroy knocked me out. . . . Maybe it was good luck to be knocked out. I ain't any prizefighter. I've got too much imagination. . . .

There had been an owl hooting in the bushes when he came up from a game of weak poker at the Ross farm through the trees in a drizzly little rain, and that was bad luck. When he got into the long living-room of the house his father was taking off wet shoes and socks by

the hearth, just back from town. Lamon was thinking how grand and hard his father looked, stretching his bared toes on the onion stone of the hearth, when Coe said: "Lamon, you can just pack up and clear outa here, soon as possible. . . ."

Who told him on me and Elsie Mott? Who? Who? He ain't never liked me. It's because grandpop kind of petted me. . . .

It's a joke on me. I bet fifty fellows will be out with women tonight in Zerbetta — maybe sixty. And they won't get caught. He'll meet 'em down town and say, 'How you, Ed? Hello, Otto!' He won't know.

If grandfather had lasted two years more, it wouldn't have happened. He would have been sitting in the corner of the big sofa, eating peanuts, with the shells slipping off his newspaper on the floor. When father said that to me, the old man would have said, "Shut your mouth, John. Leave Lamon be, you big fool. If the woman wanted to, it's no fault of his."

The other joke was that Elsie Mott married this fellow from Columbus... Do women really remember the men they fool with? Does Frankie?... All this stuff about women never forgetting in magazines and shows! Really, do they take men any harder than men take them?... If there's a baby, of course... But I bet they don't. They remember some guy — two or

three — that gave 'em a good time. . . . But love is kind of different.

When he was eighteen Lamon had loved a girl named Ottilia Smith who lived in a little house on Grand Avenue with her folks, who were Germans. He had been scared of her, because she was a kind of statue girl, with cool eyes and a long, unmoving body that stayed stiff in his arms when they danced at parties and he had never tried even to kiss her. Lamon had been red all over when his shirt came open at a picnic while he was showing Tom Errol a wrestling hold and anybody could see his whole chest naked. Then Ottilia moved away with her folks to Wooster, so she and her brother could go to college, and Lamon had written eight letters. She just answered one. This had been awful pain. His grandfather knew about it, and gave him two new suits of clothes when they went up to Cleveland to hear the President speak. When he thought of his wife, who would live on the place with him and have two sons and two daughters, she was something like Ottilia Smith, a statue, hot and red inside her pale skin, with cool eyes.

John Coe must be gray inside. His father was a gray line in his mind. . . . Lamon walked slowly down the avenue, and his back ached. When he turned under the yellow awning of the Albatross Bookshop he was tired,

scared of everything, and he went nervously among counters stuffed with books to the stairs of Abner's office. An old man was coming down the metal treads with three books in his hands, looking at their backs with red eyes covered by spectacles. He came gingerly, frightened of breaking his thin bones by a fall. And when Lamon ran up the stairs, a tall, skinny fiend of an old man in English clothes was speaking insolently to Abner with the holder of his cigarette caught in false teeth. Lamon nearly fell back down the stairs. After a little, while he was wondering what the word "paradigmatically" meant in a book he tried to read, this beast came down the treads and went humming away through the counters.

"What was 'at thing, Abner?"

"You ran like a rabbit, Lamon. That's Benedict Sanderson."

"What's he do?"

"He writes essays on art. He's been doing it so long that he's just a series of phonograph plates. You mention a painter or a sculptor and he delivers an opinion in just so many well-chosen words."

"Gee, I hate old men!"

Miss Lambert asked out of a corner filled with smoke,

"What gave you gerontophobia?"

[&]quot;Huh?"

[&]quot;Why do you hate old men?"

"Didn't see you. . . . Dunno. I just hate 'em. Grandfather was the only old man I ever liked. He'll do me, too. I like old ladies. They've got more sense."

The tall girl chanted, "I've been longing to see you, because I owe you a million dollars. You're the dragon-slayer and the bringer of sunlight. Mother would thank you, too. She's over shedding some sins in the cathedral. I can't sleep tonight without calling you blesséd."

"What did I do to you?"

She grinned, poking a book on the floor with her cane of white wood.

"Look out, Norah," Abner said. "You'll embarrass him."

"I don't care. A heart charged with gratitude must speak its piece. Lamon, in the name of the superior Irish society of the American metropolis, I thank you! I've no roses to throw at your feet. You've saved our lives. For years I've been wanting someone to kill Costello Ryan, and you've pretty nearly done it," she said, swaying her white cane; "he's abased and brought low. Tell Mrs. De Lima she can open a charge account at my shop and never pay her bills. We've been dying of Mrs. Ryan's boy Costello for years. She's sure the Pope particularly noticed C when she took him to the Vatican when he was five. . . . I'm sorry she's abroad, so she can't witness his misery. She's at Lourdes."

Lamon ran a finger inside his collar and tried not to blush.

"You — you're acquainted with him?"

"Am I not! He's being a Chevalier Des Grieux all over town."

"Huh?"

"He's telling his troubles to everybody but policemen, I mean. It's the soothingest thing that's happened in a year. I've got to go and get mother home. This is beastly weather for the first week in June, isn't it? . . . Abner, you will go to Canada with Gil Weinsheimer, won't you? Don't be an ass. You look like the devil."

Abner said, yawning, "I may. So long," and he partly rose from his chair as she whirled out of the office. Then he sat back and picked up his long cigar from a brass saucer and smiled in his usual way at Lamon.

It was funny how fond you got of a person without thinking about it. Lamon grinned and stammered, "She's a case, huh?" and stood looking at his host with something nervous in his throat. Abner couldn't get much thinner or much paler, and he broke out loudly, saying, "Say, Cousin Abner, you do look — you look fierce! Hadn't you better go see your doctor?"

He was suddenly frightened of a thing near Abner. The man would get worse unless he took medicine and went to the country. He might die. . . . Oh! He might

get a stroke, like Bob Bunce's father, and have one side of his face crinkle up, and be wheeled in a chair. Lamon wriggled a foot in its shoe.

"I suppose I do look pretty bad. Didn't sleep last night. How's Frankie?"

"Fine. Abner, why don't you do that? Go to Canada with Mr. Weinsheimer?"

"I may. . . . Upon my soul!"

A small child in white trousers was standing in the middle of the room and scowling at the two men with its nose knotted up and its fingers holding a toy ax made of painted wood. Lamon was pleased. He dropped on his knees and said, "General, you ain't goin' to hurt us, are you? . . . Come on here and tell us your name."

The child said, "My name's Theodore Rawlinson Potter — Second — and I've lost mamma."

"Come on an' we'll find her, Teddy."

"Well, all right," said Theodore. He gave his ax to Lamon and let himself be carried down the metal stairs. Several ladies cooed at him and a woman in a blue frock accepted him from Lamon with a deal of pretty laughter. Lamon kissed him on the nose and went back upstairs.

"Fond of children, aren't you?" Abner asked; "I remember you out at the farm. Who were those children who came down from that place up the road and hung around with you?"

"Bricky Parcher an' his sister—Bess. He's in the Navy. She's studyin' singing here in the city. I ought to look the kid up. She's turned out awful pretty, too. Nice girl," Lamon said. "Yeh, I like kids. I'd like two of each kind."

"Thinking of matrimony?"

"Sure. Some time. When — when I've got a house of my own," Lamon concluded; "I'd hate to get married an' not have kids. It's somethin' to think about."

The thin man moved lazily in his chair under the picture of someone named Voltaire. He began to talk fast, as if he was interested, in his deep voice.

"It's a lot of fun. At first, you know, you haven't really the sensation that this thing belongs to you in any special way. The fuss a young father makes is mostly relief that his wife's all right again, and then he gets besotted notions about this object looking like a human being, and begins to think it'll grow up. . . . There's some pity in the emotion. . . And then you wonder what he'll be like at eighteen or nineteen. You get scared at the idea of having to give him advice about alcohol and women. I can understand how men get to hate their sons. Problems."

"If I have any sons I know what I'll give 'em for advice."

"You think that, but you won't. I had Gil Weinsheimer moaning like a father in Israel because one of his

boys has developed an eye for good-looking housemaids, at lunch yesterday. . . . Dad mumbled some rubbish to me when I was sixteen or so. It's this shell that grows up around men, Lamon. A man's afraid to tell his son that most of these diversions won't do him the least harm if he's just a little prudent. He knows the kid will think, 'What a rooster you must have been!' I don't think people are complete hypocrites, Lamon. But they've an awful fear of results. Fear, really. . . . The most courageous thing I ever heard was an old Frenchman, on a station platform somewhere in Auvergne. His boy was starting for Paris. The whole family was down to see the youngster off. You could tell his mother and his married sister and his aunt Hortense who kept the sausage and ham shop, and the family priest. His old father just said, 'Lucien, amuse-toi bien! Amuse yourself, Lucien.' . . . The surrender to life, you see? . . . It was rather fine. I've never forgotten it. That's twenty years ago."

"You're a lot like grandpop, Cousin Abner. I was tellin' Frankie so the other night. . . . What grandpop said to me was, 'Never take a girl that ain't willin', sonny, or I'll knock the nose off your face.' . . . Of course, I don't drink anything. Drank some champagne last night at this fella Farrell's place to be polite. I'd as soon drink swamp-water, too. Ugh!"

Abner laughed.

"You're an appallingly moral person, Lamon. You always take your shoes off downstairs, when you come home."

"I'm housebroken, Cousin Abner. And a fella that's comin' in at three or four in the mornin' ought to be quiet about it. Do you know that man Farrell? He's a broker or somethin'. Has the whole top — the roof — of a building in —"

"I know who he is. . . . Have you noticed Frankie's interesting relation to her family? She goes out to visit them and sends them things all the time. I wonder if the tradition about erring daughters is breaking down?"

Lamon took another cigarette.

"Huh! Dorothy Post — out home — comes and visits her folks. Lives with a rich guy in Cleveland. Her brothers know it damn well! And I bet her father an' Mrs. Post do, too. No," he said, "poor folks'll stand a good deal more'n you think if the girl acts right to 'em. I bet I know more about poor folks'n you do, Abner. It's the only thing probably I do know more about. . . . Frankie's awful kind to her family an' they 'preciate it. And you couldn't reform Frankie. I've fooled with girls like her before — only she's kind of superior to — to most girls like that."

"Endlessly gay," Abner said. "Yes, she's a good

woman. But try to explain that sort of women to a lady, once."

"I did, once," said Lamon, "out in Seattle. My friend Bob Temmer's wife. I didn't get much of any place with it, neither. And —"

One of the ladies who sold books came rustling a smock of green linen into the room.

"Have you seen this announcement of Faulkner's, Mr. Coe?"

"No. More private editions?"

"Not this time. It's a special edition of Vincent Currey's three books. Twenty dollars."

Abner said, "Infernal gods! Are they going to turn that boy into an American classic because he killed himself? . . . Get a couple of sets, Miss West. Some sentimental idiot may want one."

The lady rustled downstairs. Her ankles were pretty good.

"That the kid went yella and jumped under the cars last month?"

"Yes."

"Hell," said Lamon, "there's a ton of cowards around! A kid, wasn't he? Old man Heinrich did it out home, right after grandpop died. But he was two thirds paralyzed an' near ninety, and poor. . . . 'N look where that Currey leaves his folks! People'll say he was full of

this siph'lis or he was bein' blackmailed or somethin'. It ain't moral. It's a dirty thing to do!"

"Discouragement, Lamon."

"Tell it to the fish! He was a kid, wasn't he? And he could ha' got a job sellin' water-closets or shoes or somethin' if he wasn't any good writin' books. You only get one life off God. If God knows anything about it. For all 'at damn fool knew, he was goin' to meet a nice girl with a million dollars the next day. Jesus! You and Mr. Devlin were sayin' how dumb professional athletes must be, other night. A prize-fighter that gets thrashed once don't go out in the dressin'-room an' cut his neck open. . . . A fella like that Currey ought to've been smart enough to know better. And it ain't right. He must ha' been a weak sister. If he was old an' busted down and sick there'd be some —"

I'm saying the wrong thing. He must have liked Currey. . . . Abner was staring at Lamon's hand spread on the desk. His face was funny around the mouth. . . I've said something wrong. Must have liked the fool.

"You're tremendously strong, Lame," Abner said. He touched Lamon's hand on the desk, and then smiled up, looking shy. "You've got enormous force. Like Frankie. Currey was a country boy, but he was weedy—nervous.... Don't suppose you can understand that discouragement. You see, he'd had his cheap little

heaven—his publicity, his petting, and all that, and then he'd failed. I never liked him, or his books. But I can understand what happened to him." He stared at the desk. Then his head jerked up. "I agree with you. He was an ass! Utter. Utter and complete."

"Yeh. Sure," Lamon said. "Somethin' would ha' turned up for this damn fool. . . . Cousin Abner, d'you think of how you're goin' to say things? I mean, you're an awful good talker. Do you—do you kind of work out what you're goin' to say ahead?"

"Not particularly. Do I sound so artificial?"

"Well—yes. I mean—Most people can't talk like you. I was listenin' to some of these men last night at this Farrell's. College men, I s'pose, and they can't talk like you. Frankie was sayin' the other night you're the best talker she ever heard."

"Self-defence," Abner said. "Dining out?"

"No. I'll be home. Frankie's went out to Rye to see an old bag she knew when she was a kid in Chicago. . . . I — I ain't been home much lately, Cousin Abner."

"Lucien, amuse-toi!"

Lamon grinned and went comfortably down the stairs. In the doorway of the shop he met the frightening Mr. Weinsheimer, Abner's lawyer, who was coming along like the picture of a suit of clothes—gray flannel—with his air of smelling the world as something a little stale.

"Ah? Abner upstairs?"

"Yessir. . . . Say, Mr. Weinsheimer. Make Abner go to Canada with you. He's got me scared. Honest. He's so thin I could wrap him around my arm."

Mr. Weinsheimer nodded.

"Can't you make him eat? He seems to have no appetite at all."

"Yeh, noticed that."

Mr. Weinsheimer said in his dry, prim way, "I'll see if I can't take him to Banff with me. Glad you're staying with him. Gives him some variety. . . . You know this literary lot all live on their nerves. They upset each other. Worst of them."

"I dunno much about 'em."

"Envy you," said Mr. Weinsheimer, and went on into the shop.

Abner declared he was a remarkable person and one of the most honorable men in the world, but he never said anything much and his sallow face was always daunting. He had been Uncle Philip's office boy, years ago, and the engineer had sent him to Harvard. . . . Lamon crossed Fifth Avenue when a policeman lifted a white cotton glove and walked down the street another block.

This church was Saint Patrick's cathedral that Bob McCready out home always talked about. . . . Lamon hung his thumbs in the lower pockets of his waistcoat

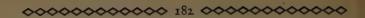
and examined the building with one foot on the last step of its terrace. A couple of fat women leaked out of a brown door and came down blinking in the sunlight, talking Italian to each other. They thought they would get let off from this purgatory where Catholics said they went by telling their sins to a priest. It was funny how people thought about stuff like that. Fear, Norah Lambert said, was the bottom of all religions. Abner said that there were two religious emotions. He had fought a long time with the tall girl about it and long words had just weltered out of them. . . . Lamon walked up the steps and rubbed his nose timidly. But he wanted to see the inside of the gray church, and Catholics went in and out of their churches all times of the day. The big one in Paris had been very dark because the glass windows were covered up for fear of shells from the German guns. Lamon took off his hat and went in to see what this church was like.

A green light was nice behind the raised platform where men were singing, and hundreds of people in the pews were kneeling as black points pressed down in brown frames. Away at one side of the platform a man dressed in red was sitting in a chair, with white gowns near him. That must be the cardinal, who had to wear red clothes all the time. A cardinal was the next best thing to being the Pope — a kind of manager in the business. Well, it

was a good-looking church. The green light from beyond the platform came through colored windows that must open on Madison Avenue. . . . It was like a forest behind the platform, there, and Lamon smiled at the light.

As for God minding any of this singing or praying, that was just superstition. God was a lot too big a person to bother with listening to anything men could put out, no matter who they were.

People moved in the side aisles of the gray place where candles were lighted and a big young fellow in a black gown came past Lamon in a military pace, talking softly to two ladies. Lamon swung his hat against his leg and yawned. Some funny smell stirred everywhere around him. . . . Wax, he thought, and that incense. . . . He yawned and looked at a girl in a long shimmery cloak of some thin black stuff who was watching the lights or the red cardinal. She was watching the cardinal. Her face shifted as the red man got up from his chair. Lamon grinned, and said, "Hey, Bess!"



CHAPTER X

E ast Fiftieth Street ended up in a fence, and the green river was distracting below him. Some kids splashed in and out of water, diving from a pink, anchored barge, but they were so far down that it did not matter about Bess seeing them. Lamon locked his arms on the fence and said, "It is quiet over this way, sister, ain't it? Go on about Tom Errol, though. Wrote me he was a grand bridegroom."

"He was simply wet with perspiration, Lame, and he nearly dropped the ring. But it was an awfully pretty wedding. I think the whole town was there and just tons of people from Cleveland. All Grace's relatives. And some girls she knew at Vassar."

"Tom's a good guy. Where'd he go to college?"

"Princeton."

"Oh, yeh. That's up in New Haven, ain't it?"

"No. . . . Lamon you're just uncivilized! Princeton's in New Jersey."

"Well, it's no skin off my nose, Bessie. Where's Tom and Grace goin' to live?"

"They're living with Mrs. Webb. I don't think Tom

likes that much, but I don't suppose men ever do like their mothers-in-law. . . . Here comes the boat to Boston."

The kids below on the barge stopped splashing and all set their tanned tails on the rail to watch a white steamer come past. Lamon hoped that Bess would not notice them and get embarrassed and turn away from the river. He did not want to go and sit in her boarding house.

"Funny, I ain't ever been over here. . . . It is nice an' quiet. You get some air, too. Who's this you take singin' lessons off of?"

"Take lessons from, Lame, for goodness' sake! I should think your cousin would have fits over your grammar. You're worse than Brick. . . . He's a Mr. Hendrickson. He's a terrible old lady, but he is a good teacher."

"You ain't goin' on the stage or somethin'?"
She looked at him and began laughing.

"Lamon! Can you see father and mother letting me go on the stage? No! . . . It was just for something to do. There aren't enough jobs for girls in Zerbetta. And Aunt Florence left me this money — four thousand dollars — and mother is proud of my voice, because she can't sing a note. It's not much of a voice. . . . And they wanted me here on account of Brick. I'm being a moral influence.

Mother's so funny about it. I'm ten months older than Brick, so she thinks I can manage him."

"Where's his ship?"

"Oh, up around Maine, I suppose. The fleet goes out to practice up there. . . . Is that a fire in Brooklyn?"

Smoke was a straight tree from somewhere blocks deep in Brooklyn close to the other end of the great bridge clanking to the north of them. But it got thin while Bess stared, lifting her round chin so that her white throat showed inside the flimsy cloak and her breasts rose in her plain white gown.

"Just burnin' something in a yard, I guess. . . . Goin' to be here all summer, honey?"

"Mercy, no! I'm going home in July, Lame. . . . I may come back in September."

Oh, she was going home! Lamon scowled at the river sewn with sliding tugs and glittering in whirls of light.

"July . . ."

"Henry's birthday's the fifth, you know."

Henry was her little brother. He must be twelve or thirteen, now. The Parchers always had big parties on birthdays, with games and presents.

"I'll get you somethin' to take him, sister. . . . Say, Bess, you've grown up! I missed seein' you when I came home from Chicago. You was away at school. . . . Has Aunt Marian got any fatter?"

"No. Just as thin. I'm ever so fond of Mrs. Meigs, Lamon. I think she's sweet."

You're sweet, Lamon thought. Got sense enough to learn something away at school, too. Dora Keller and Edna Ghent came back with a lot of clothes and no more sense than they ever had, but you're improved. Like a city girl. Wise. . . . Wind forced the gown back suddenly between her knees. . . . Yes, she knew how to fix her skirt with a knee.

"Anybody told you you're awful handsome, honey?"

"No color in my hair, Lame. Brick's the good-looking one in our family. He looks like mamma's father. . . . Lamon . . ."

"Huh?"

She reddened all over her face.

"I suppose you're dreadfully angry at father?"

"Me? What for?"

He knew. It came through his skin what she was going to say when she was brave enough to say it. He knew why he should be angry at Edward Parcher. . . . She was scared, now. Lamon put a hand on her shoulder.

"Go on, sister."

"I'm so ashamed of him! Father's a perfect old lady about — about some things. He told Mr. Coe about — about you and Mrs. Mott."

After a while she went on.

"Mamma told me. She begged him not to say anything. Mamma's very fond of you, Lamon, and she was so humiliated, and she's never liked Mrs. Mott anyhow. But people were talking . . . I knew that myself. Betty Alberts wrote me about it at school. Of course — Mrs. Mott's always been silly. Mamma told him not to mix up in it. But he's so — so moral. I — I don't want you to be angry at him, please. He likes you and he thought he was doing the right thing. . . . I don't think for a minute he thought your father would — would take it that way. And it was all so ridiculous when Mrs. Mott married that man from Cleveland, or wherever it was, while —"

Lamon looked over the water at Brooklyn.... Thought of every man and woman in town except Parcher. God!... Father stopped in to play chess a piece with him and — She's going to cry in a minute.

"That's all right, sister. Only, some time, I'd like to ask Mr. Parcher just what he thought he was doin'—
It's all right, honey."

"No, it isn't all right, Lame. You've always been good to Brick and me and you're like one of the family and father should have spoken to you if he wanted to say anything. It wasn't fair! But he did go to Mr. Coe after you'd gone away and tell him not to be so hard on you."

"Grandpop used to say, 'Better never than late,"

said Lamon, leaning tired on the iron fence. "Everybody in town knew he kicked me out. Was one of the hired men listenin' in the kitchen. I ain't mad, sister. It's how people act. I'm near thirty. Been around a lot. People don't ever mean to make trouble, so they just go and do it. I bet Mr. Parcher was sorry as hell. Always been nice with me. . . . Funny! I've been wondering—course—but it don't matter. I'd ha' come home and had a fuss with your dad, two years back, if I'd knew. . . . You can't understand it. Elsie Mott didn't mean a damn thing to me. 'N I didn't mean nothin' to her.''

"I suppose I don't really understand," the girl said; "I guess I just think I do. I mean, I just don't see how it would mean so little to Mrs. Mott. . . . Maybe it didn't mean anything much to you. But I can't understand that in a woman. . . . Let's talk about something that isn't embarrassing for a change."

She must be scared as hell. She don't show it much.

She's grown up.

All at once he remembered that he had taken her out for a dance at the big party in the gymnasium of the high school when she was a flat kid sitting with the mothers on the edge of the floor. It was the dance for men coming home from France in 1919, and she had on a white dress. They went out in the yard, so he could smoke, and sat on the iron fence, and he kissed her, to see whether she

would squawk in surprise. And she said, "You oughtn't to embarrass me, Lamon," in her grave, polite little way. She's forgotten that.

"And so you didn't like California?"

"I did when I was on 'at fruit place at Fresno. I'm a farmer, sister. . . . No, I hated Los Angeles. Like poison."

"Why? Homesick?"

"Yeh . . ."

Fire rose in his throat. He began speaking fast.

"Wouldn't you be homesick?... I got me a job in a grocery store, drivin' a truck. 'N that blew up 'cause the man's nephew came on from Chicago an' hadda have a job. . . . 'N then I was out of work for three weeks. 'N then I got a couple of jobs in the moving pictures. 'N that's a swell business! . . . God, that's swell! 'N then a guy saw me boxin' in a scene where it was a gymnasium, and asked me did I want to show in his fightin' club one night. 'N he was a dirty Jew! Fought for him six times. Got licked once an' he didn't pay me what was comin' to me. . . . 'N I was broke — flat — hadn't a dollar to my name. 'N then I worked in a sportin' goods store a couple of weeks . . . 'N then I run into some folks 'at had a store in Boston and came on east with them. . . . I was lonesomer out in Los Angeles'n than a cemetery. I ain't told even Cousin Abner all that. I ain't told anybody — but you, sister. And don't you say nothin' about it. . . . Gettin' your face pounded for ten dollars! I bet Abner pays his driver more a week than I made in two months."

She said, "Oh, Lamon Coe!" and put her hand on his arm. . . . Lamon stopped panting and looked down at her. . . . I could kiss you and you'd let me. You're a nice girl. You're sorry for me.

"I won't tell anybody, Lame, but I don't see anything to be ashamed of. But you must have been dreadfully discouraged."

"Oh . . . Well, I was, a couple of times. But I ain't ever been sick in my life, sister, except in hospital when my face was smashed. Long as I can get a job, I can work. Only, I like to eat — an' plenty of hot water. An' clean underclothes . . . You ought to see Abner's Filipino boys look after me! I'm gettin' spoiled. He's an awful good man. Too smart for me," he said, "but he's awful damn good to me. Guess I amuse him, some."

"Of course you do, Lame. I expect he is nice."

"Awful nice. You'd like him. He's kind of like grandpop. Sickly, though. Yeh, I'm havin' an awful good time with him. Except I get so homesick, and don't you laugh at me or I'll spank you. You ain't ever been away from home two years. . . . Say, your eyes are darker'n they used to be."

"It's the light, Lame. . . . Lamon —"

"Huh?"

"I'm going to write mother that I've seen you and that you're — behaving beautifully and looking so well. . . , I think I'll tell a lie. I'll say I've seen you three or four times instead of just twice. Your father likes mamma. She'll say something to him. . . . This just can't go on, Lame! It's simply ridiculous!"

"You can say you've seen me a lot, sister, 'cause you're goin' to. I'm a hog for not comin' round to see you before, but — I was scared I'd break out an' tell you all this. An' I did. . . . Knew I would."

Her eyes were cool, blue again as she turned her face a little to look at an old lady walking down to the fence, leaning on a stick with a haughty gray cat at her skirts, tinkling a bell on his collar.

"Men are so silly. Why shouldn't you tell me, Lame?"

"I dunno . . . I ain't even told Abner about prize-fightin'."

"Your scars are awfully becoming," she said; "I've been wanting to say that for an hour. Are you sensitive about them, Lame?"

"No. Not as much as I was. If I'd ever been handsome, I might be more. . . . Hey, I'll get Cousin Abner to ask you to dinner. You'd like him. He's an awful fine man. Ain't it funny how fond you get of folks and don't know

it? It just struck me right now — over in his store — that I'm fond of him."

"Why?"

He said, "He's good. His friend Miss Lambert was telling me the other night he lends money to these writers and stuff, and gets books printed for 'em, and listens to their troubles, and he don't pretend he's doin' anything for them. And he's wise. He knows an awful lot. But he don't pretend he's wise. It ain't so much he's good to me, but he's just good. He does some things that dad would say were immoral. . . . But he's good."

The girl was like Frankie De Lima as she stood looking at him. He was confused, and wondered if women truly saw far into men. She could not know about Frankie. That was silly. But he stared off at a little sailing-ship in the river.

"Lame, you've grown up. You used to admire just athletes and soldiers. You've grown up."

"Maybe I have, sister."

"Well, I'm always fond of the same people. Mamma says I'm cold, Lame. But I don't make friends easily. Only made one when I was away at school."

"Who's nice in your boarding house?"

"Just old Mrs. Gibney. She's an invalid. On the first floor. The rest of them are soap."

That was a fine word for some kinds of people. They

slipped around you and bobbed off in the tub and you never saw what they had in them. Bessie was smart. It was this way of talking that showed it, and that was how Cousin Abner might have spoken of some dull people who'd come in for tea or drinks. He leaned on the fence, watching a board loose in the river.

"Bess, the people I miss most, out home, are folks like Tom Errol and Aunt Marian — and you — that have some sense to 'em. I guess I am grown up."

"You write to Tom, and your aunt, and to Bob Mc-Cready. Why don't you write a note to your father?"

"Dad? I can't!"

"Do you hate him like that?"

"Hate? - No. I don't hate him."

The proud gray cat came up to look at them and Lamon knelt to make friends with him, and grinned at the handsome old lady, walking slowly along the fence toward her pet. But the cat turned and darted up the little street to the north and the old lady made after him calling, "Silver! Silver!" Lamon stayed on one knee, watching Bessie's skirt whirl on her legs.

Frankie would be through with him, some time, and another man would catch her. That was Frankie. It was all right, too, if you had sense enough to see it in her. And she would not pretend that he had done something wrong, as that Hutton girl did out in Los Angeles. . . .

Gave her back her money, soon as I could. Black-headed women can be damn nasty. . . . People who pretended were the ones that were wrong.

"I ain't pretendin' I like dad, Bessie."

"You've always been so frightened of him, Lame."
She is smart. I always have been. How's she know it?
"That's so, sister."

"You shouldn't be. That's wrong. He's just a man."

"Yeh. But he scares me. And he sent me away from home. And I'm not goin' back until I've got enough money to have a place, or buy in a store with somebody. . . . Been fine talkin' to you, sister."

In this dusk she was a dark bush swaying over him. He wanted to hide his face in her and cry. They said nothing, walking side by side down to her steps in the line of steep gray steps all along the north side of the street. When her cloak stirred on the steps he wanted to hold her back.

"Don't you get homesick, Bess?"

"Yes. Come around when you feel blue."

Home was going from him up the steps.

"Hey, I'll have Abner give a party for you, honey!"

"Oh, don't do that, Lame!"

"But I want you to meet him, Bessie. You'll like him."

"All right. Lamon, I want you to make it up with Mr.

Coe — with your father. Can't you swallow your pride and write to him?"

"Oh," he said, "I'll think about it. See you soon, Bess."

I had to pretend I was scared to come and see her, 'cause you can't tell a girl you've forgotten all about her, and I pretty near had, except Frankie's made me think of her sometimes, when she has her head back. You don't forget folks when they stay in your head at all.

He hunted in a pocket for a match, walking away, and found the check he had given Frankie. She had slipped it into his clothes while she was kissing him. He must make her take it back. But that was good of her, and I must say thanks for it.

If Bess saw me with Frankie in a theater or something she would have sense enough not to write to her mother she'd seen me with a . . . She don't want to get me in trouble. We've always been friends.

Wonder if she remembers about me kissing her that time?

CHAPTER XI

Her landlady always sent in the last newspaper to Mrs. Gibney, after dinner, and tonight it was interesting because dozens of small pieces on the front page told about wrecked motors and deaths. So much happened in a Saturday morning and afternoon, in summer. She almost thought of Saturdays as being cruel to young people, let out of hot offices, who got in the way of cars or swam too far from the beaches, trying to have an immoderate good time. And the thunderstorm at noon had been terrible. A church in Hoboken was struck by lightning. There was a panic on a suburban train when the driver stopped where a tree was blown down on the tracks. And a woman had given birth to a baby in a drug store, frightened by thunder along Broadway.

Mrs. Gibney sat in the wheel chair beside the open windows and read the newspaper. Pools in the gutter of East Fiftieth Street were brilliant under the moon and people talked pleasantly in the coolness blown from the river. Her pink lamp made no heat but gave a waft of violets into the chamber because Miss Parcher had squeezed a drop of perfume on silk of the shade.

The second Saturday of June, the newspaper remarked, had been rendered lugubrious at Long Beach by the drowning of Mrs. Flora Castlebury, of East Tenth Street. And a young man identified by friends as Mr. Todd Mathewson, of Manhattan, an employé of Ryan Brothers, had been killed by lightning far up the beach. It was believed that the metal key of his bathhouse, hanging to his neck by a cord, attracted the lightning, as several other bathers in his neighborhood were partly stunned.

Mrs. Gibney looked at the street and mused. How many lives, she pondered, were encased in this enormous city, held away from each other by walls and streets! It was stunning to think over, when she had no connection with any of these people who had passed on today and had never heard of any of them. It gave you a feeling of God's immensity. Millions of people, and millions of planets, and many universes outside this one, all locked together by the almighty power of God. It was a dreamy, incredible thing to be alive. She polished a nail on the edge of her robe and wondered at things, at the errors of ordinary people, and at their violence of activity. A city, she had often said, was so much like an ant hill. And soon she should get to bed, because it was late, but it was so nice to think here beside the window, and the gray cat from Beekman Place had come around to sit studying the moon. His bell tinkled when he ran off from a big motor sliding luxuriously to the curb straight in front of Mrs. Gibney's window.

Miss Parcher was laughing as the tall man brought her up the steps. They stopped at the last step. He was dark and his shirt was a brilliant shell when his cigarette burned.

"But you are idiotic, Lamon!"

"Don't see why, sister. A cow's better company'n most people."

"That's misanthropy, Lame."

The tall man said, in his heavy, reaching voice, "Hi, don't use words 'at size, Bess. You're nothin' but a pup. Wait until you're my age."

"Well, it was an awfully nice party. And Mr. Coe is charming. And he looks just ghastly! He'd be handsome if he wasn't so thin, Lamon. Your whole family has such beautiful eyes."

The man drawled, "My God, I got a compliment!"

"I expect you've had lots."

He tossed his cigarette away.

"Not so many. What you doin' in the mornin'? I've got an engagement for lunch. . . . Hey, Michael, did Mr. Coe give you an order for the mornin'?"

The driver of the black car said, "No, sir."

"I can't go driving, Lame! Please, no! I've got to -"

"Aw!"

"No, I can't really! Call me up on Monday or Tuesday.

And it was such a nice party."

"All right. I'll ring up Monday. . . . Good night, honey."

He did not kiss her. He went trotting down the steps and waved a hand before he whipped into the car, and it circled around into Beekman Place. Mrs. Gibney shivered. His dangerous voice had shaken her, as if it had plunged down her throat and into her bowels. The girl was right not to go driving with him alone, in a closed car. That kind of man! A voice like that was simply an announcement that he was a peril to women.

"May I come in for just a minute?"

"What a lovely dress!"

"I don't think it is. I'm afraid it's too low."

Much too low, of course, and she did it on purpose because she knows how pretty her skin is. At least a hundred dollars.

"My dear, perhaps it is a little low. I'm afraid I'm no judge. It's certainly much more modest than the patterns in the magazines. Where did you have it made?"

"I bought it," said Miss Parcher, "yesterday."

She went turning down the room in the measure of a dance to the high mirror in the bedchamber and then

came wandering back until the pink lamp colored her white gown again.

"Such a nice party!"

"In a restaurant?"

"Oh, no! At Mr. Abner Coe's house. He has two Filipino boys for servants, and the food was so good. It was just a little dinner . . . Mr. Coe, and Lamon Coe, and a Miss Lambert — she wasn't pretty, but her clothes were gorgeous — and a Mr. Weinsheimer and his wife — she was very pretty, and dull as possible."

"Gilbert Weinsheimer?"

"They called him Gil. He's about forty-four or five.

"My dear, his wife is Judge Thomas Keenan's daughter. I was taking some papers down to Mr. Weinsheimer's office when I had my mishap. He's moved his offices uptown now, I believe. He's an excellent lawyer, of course."

"He's Mr. Coe's lawyer. . . . Miss Lambert was such a lot of fun. But people do talk awfully, here! I think she could have said breast, instead of breasts. She was talking about a fat aunt of her mother's. . . . She's a decorator. Has a shop on Madison Avenue. She and Mr. Coe had a fight about which was the ugliest public building in New York. He said the Public Library was, and she said something else. He said a building could look

harmless and then its banalities crept up on you and bit you one by one. He's so different from Lamon, except that they both have the same kind of eyes."

"Is Mr. Coe from Zerbetta, dear?"

"No, his father was," the girl said, settling on a chair; "Lamon's from Zerbetta. He's always been a kind of big brother to me. He's very fond of Brick — my brother — and he's years older than us. It's so funny seeing Lamon in New York! He's always had nice clothes, and he looked so smart, tonight, and then he opened his mouth and was just a farmer. It's what he is. He's been all over the country, and in France, in the war. But he's just Lamon Coe."

"He has a very interesting voice," said Mrs. Gibney.

"Oh, no. He's never been good-looking, except his eyes. And he has dreadful scars on his forehead. His hair's nice. My brother says he's the most beautifully built man he's ever seen, when he hasn't any clothes on. He just isn't civilized. He never studied at school, just played on teams. And he isn't clever. I'm very fond of him. He's so safe to be around with."

"I'm such an old woman, my dear, that I don't understand what that means," Mrs. Gibney hopefully suggested. "Safe?"

"Safe," the tall girl said. "I've had terrible times with

boys. Lamon's like a nice, big dog. He wouldn't . . . take any liberties unless a girl let him. He's really very shy. Older women have always made perfect fools of themselves about him. And one of them got him into a regular scandal. The worst boys are the ones who fall in love with you — I mean — all of a sudden."

"Isn't that romantic?"

"I don't know what it is," said Miss Parcher, in her cool voice, "but I hate it. In 1919 dad gave a boy who was just out of the army a job on our place, and he was simply disgusting. I wasn't old enough to know what was coming. But I did get away. . . . It scared me so that I didn't even want to go to the big dance for the soldiers, on the Fourth of July. I sat with mamma and Lame's aunt, and when he came and asked me to dance, I was frightened. It was just a week after this other boy . . . We went out in the yard and sat on the fence, and he smoked, and told me silly stories about the army, and he did kiss me. But it was just like my birthday, you know. I wasn't scared at all."

"It is very nice to have a reliable, older friend," said Mrs. Gibney; "and I'm sorry he isn't handsome."

"I don't like awfully handsome men," Miss Parcher said; "Lame and I were just talking about one, coming over. His name's Anson Lauffler. Lame was saying what a perfect lady Ans is, and I nearly laughed. Because he's

the filthiest animal I've ever known. I wanted to tell him so. No girl at home lets Ans come near her at a party if she can help it. . . Lame isn't that way at all. He's very respectful. . . . He's in love with some woman here."

Mrs. Gibney sighed. It would have been nice to have him come in and be introduced and to have him take some tea.

"Are they engaged?"

"I don't know. He hasn't any money. And I don't think she's — I saw them at the Walling Theater, one night. She's older than he is. About thirty-three or four. Wonderful clothes. Yellow hair. She's the sort of woman he admires."

"A little bit of a thing, of course?"

"No. She looked pretty tall," said Miss Parcher, roaming to the window. Moonlight entered her silver gown, and her pallid hair was green. "I hope he isn't serious about her. . . . He wants to go home."

She seemed to have no shadow, between the moon and the lamp.

"She telephoned to him when we were at dinner. He got so red! One of the Filipinos came and whispered to him. And he went out."

"You don't think it's a — a disreputable connection?"

"Shouldn't wonder. His father's so strict with Lame

at home that he might be trying to be wild, when he's away. He hasn't any morals, anyhow. I don't think most people have. I think they just do what they want and forget how bad it was if nothing comes of it. But he's fond of people. And if he's with nice people, he'll always be nice. He's sweet to his cousin. And he doesn't drink. And he's wonderful on a farm. . . . Some woman who knows how to manage Lame could be very happy with him."

The gray cat had come discreetly back from hiding and now sat all silver in the street as if he waited for the moon to send him down a mouse.

CHAPTER XII

FRANKIE'S butler opened the bronze door an inch and looked through the slit with one eye for a second, as if he had suspicions of a tramp. He stood aside to let Lamon pass and then said, "Just had a fine time here, captain!"

"9 woH"

"Mrs. De Lima had to turn a gentleman out, sir. He wouldn't take a No."

"Who was he?"

"Mr. Costello Ryan, sir."

"The hell!"

"Yes, sir," said Grady, "all of that, sir. Fortunately Mr. Farrell was here and made himself useful. . . . Mrs. De Lima's in the dining-room, sir."

Farrell, a burly young man who was always talking boats, sat at Frankie's left and the woman named Jen at her right. Two giant candles lit the faces and Lamon saw that Frankie was still angry, and felt the anger in her mouth turned up to his.

"We just had a lovely time, Lame!"

"Grady was tellin' me, honey."

Mr. Farrell took a drink of sparkling water and shrugged.

"The trouble with Costello is that his fool mother's always spoiled him. And he drinks like a fool. Known him all my life."

"Well, I've known him one year," Frankie said, "and that's sufficient. I ain't scared of any man alive, but I hate it when they're drunk and begin to cry. He made me so mad, Lame, I wanted to throw a table at him."

The woman named Jen commenced a tale about a theatrical manager who always cried when he had trouble with his stars. She bulged against the rim of the round table and talked merrily, eating salted nuts from a fat palm. Lamon stood back of Frankie's low chair, her head on his hard shirt, and watched a candle flame. . . . Michael had driven him over from East Fiftieth Street, talking impressively about his brother who was a priest and promoted to be Monsignor Ryan's secretary, and this Monsignor Ryan was Costello Ryan's uncle. People hooked into each other funnily, even in this wide town.

"Well, but crying," Farrell said, "is a kind of defense, Jen. I was talking to a doctor about it, at a party. Lots of people know that they make you helpless—embarrassed—by crying. They do it mechanically. It's—"

"You don't have to tell women that, Jim," Frankie

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yawned, rubbing her hair on Lamon's coat. "How was your party, honey?"

"It wasn't a party, Frankie. Just six for dinner. . . . These folks from out home that are in town for a while. Abner woke up and got talkin'. Haven't seen him so excited in a dog's age. He got talking about architecture. What's an — acanthus?"

Jen looked alarmed. Frankie shook her head. But Mr. Farrell knew.

"It's an ornament, a kind of design. Looks like an eggplant gone wrong. Common as dirt."

Common as dirt. Common as dirt... Lamon watched the flame .. Most people were common as dirt, under their clothes and manners. Take Weinsheimer's Christian wife. Not a word out of her at dinner but what a girl in a shop could ha' thought. Bess is three times as smart as she is. Made Abner laugh. ... My kids are going to be educated, or I'll know why. If father'd sent me to college . . . Bet he didn't want me more educated than he is! I bet that's it! Scared I'd laugh at him. Thought Uncle Phil was a fool for sendin' Abner to Harvard. Didn't see why he just didn't put him to work engineering. I can remember him talking to grandpop about it. . . . No, he didn't want me to be better'n him! Scared to! He stood scowling at the flame while Frankie smoked four cigarettes.

"I was talking to a man at a party about psychology. He's a fellow who's really studied it, you know," Farrell said, "and he says the real source of everything isn't love — that's what some psychologists say — but the sense of power. Can't remember the details. But it's rather like this. As long as everything's all right, your sense of power isn't upset. Then something happens and disturbs your balance. The minute that happens, your sense of power gets to jiggling, and you're scared. You may not think you're scared, but everything you do shows it. He was illustrating this by a fellow at the party, a shy kind of kid, who was drinking like the devil. Wanted to get his nerve up to talk to people. . . . Now the trouble with C. Ryan is that you've upset his power."

They always heard things at a party. Frankie's parties were just kind of echoing boxes. They had heard, from someone at a party, that a stock was going down or some manager had a new show, or that someone was a fine painter . . . Didn't know it themselves. They heard it. Abner knows things himself.

It was cool in the square dining-room. Lamon hated the city and pressed his fingers down on Frankie's arm. Get rid of these people. Get rid of them. Come and fool with me. Be naked. I feel cold.

"Scared?" Jen said; "I was just palpitatin'! The car

stopped about ten feet short from the tracks. Honest, my heart was just crawling out of me!"

Frankie asked, "Lame, what are you most scared of in this world?"

"Dad."

Everybody laughed while he chewed his tongue.

"Well," said Farrell, "a father can be pretty alarming. Mine was. God rest him! I think I'm more scared of fire than anything else. Not that I was keen on being shot at by the Germans. But fire gives me the horrors."

"Wasn't Abner's wife burned to death, Lame?"

"Yeh. He was in the Navy. She and their kid. He had a house at a place named New Canaan. They don't know how it took fire. Cousin Charlotte smoked a lot. They guessed she set fire to something in her bedroom. The kid's room was next door."

"Oh, God," said Jen, pushing back from the table, "ask me about it! When Amity was a little girl she was a fool for playing with matches! The time I had with her. We were living in St. Paul and it was a frame house. . . . Take me home, Jim."

"I thought you were at a hotel, Jen!"

"No, I got a new maid today. Honest, Frankie, I don't see how you got the sand to stay in a place as big as this alone, nights."

"Why not?"

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"Aren't your servants here at night, Frankie?" Mr. Farrell asked.

"No. They're all married and go home."

"I hate married servants," Jen yawned, and heaved out of her chair.

But she was slow in going. She had to chatter about her daughter's new film, and some hats at her shop, and Mr. Farrell talked in the hall about his newest motor boat. . . . Some of these people were like kids with a new toy. They talked about a boat or a car or a hat as simply as that. They had something new and you had to hear all about it. Abner said that objects satisfied some people instead of tastes or thoughts. Called the remark a "platitude." . . . Frankie has just the same kind of arms that Bess has. There they go.

Frankie slung her arms around him.

"You was cross when I telephoned."

"No, I wasn't."

"Yes."

"Suppose I sounded cross. They'd just put the ice cream on and I didn't want mine to melt on me. And Luis didn't say it was you, honey. . . . Frankie, you ain't cashed that check yet. I've given it to you twice. You cash it."

"Tore it up last night."

"Frankie!"

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"Oh, Lame! You're poor! . . . I made two thousand this week off commissions. Jen just gave me a check. What's six hundred dollars, h'm?"

"No, Frankie!"

"Tired of me? Scared I'll get drunk and tell somebody?"

"Aw, no, no, no!"

"Well, why can't I make you a present?"

"But —"

"You ain't kissed me since last night."

She was a tent, shutting out everything from him. The green stairs and the faint lamps and the butler's motions slipping on a coat by the bronze door, and the flicker of a scarf on the rails of the stair — everything dimmed away in the feeling of her mouth on his lips. He was warm again.

CHAPTER XIII

"Tell me what that tapestry means, first, doctor."

Dr. Henry went gigantically between Abner and the gray Chinese tapestry hung to the blue wall. He leaned beyond the narrow hanging, with a thick cigarette in his lips.

"Judgment day. You're the first new patient who's noticed it in at least four months. I'm fond of it, myself.
. . . Again, about that sensation?"

Abner shut his eyes, and flattened a hand on the table near him.

"I'm in a bowl — or box — of glass. I can hear and see through it as well as can be, but I'm inside. This passes off when something interests me a great deal. I can make an effort and break through. I can talk business through it, at the shop. I talked a hailstorm the other night and amused people, through it. Talked about bad architecture. My young cousin brought an educated country girl to dine — a nice child. I assaulted American architecture and the fine arts to try to shock her. . . .

People like that generally admire the vapidly correct.
. . . It blows up — passes off."

- "Partly physical condition, Coe."
- "I've had it four years."
- "But not as strongly as you have it now?"
- "No," said Abner.

He was docile in his chair, his eyes open. It said four o'clock on the dial close to his hand. Lamon had been waiting outside in the car, talking prize-fights to Michael for two hours.

"I want to congratulate you on your defenses," Dr. Henry said, at a cabinet between the shaded windows; "the night I saw you at New Rochelle I just thought you looked badly run down — under weight. I'd no idea of all this damned nonsense. . . . You ve been through an accumulated shock. You got through the original disaster very well, you thought. You kept yourself in hand, tried to occupy yourself — wrote, fooled with charities. But it crept up on you. Now that you're over the worst of it, just behave yourself. . . . Who's this fellow who wants you to go to Canada with him?"

- "My lawyer. Gilbert Weinsheimer."
- "Restful?"
- "Very. Has the foible of being fond of me."
- "That's an asinine remark," said Dr. Henry, writing on a labelled bottle full of red pills; "I know dozens of

people who know you. You're well spoken of. And that means something. . . . You've no mistress?''

"No, doctor. Had one last year. . . . But it was too dull trying to talk to a light lady through a pane of glass. But she's very beautiful, and amusing . . . It was an effort, though."

"You probably just shoved yourself further back in your shell, young man. And bored the poor girl to tears. You can't substitute appreciation and sensation for real desire. But that's not very important. The important thing is the vulgar matter of diet. . . . Food almost nauseates you, now, you say?"

"Yes."

"You'll take one of these before each meal . . . I think they'll help. You have extraordinary will-power, Coe — like your father, I suppose — and you've done a good job with yourself. You're not to walk an extra step until I tell you to. You ll have your dinner in bed tonight. I've no office hours in the morning. I'll walk over to see you. Stay in bed until then. . . . Give us your wrist a minute. Not bad," he presently drawled, "for a person in your starved state. . . . I've no intention of scaring you, but you're to be careful."

"I understand that," said Abner.

The giant's voice washed on the glass around him.

'Your blood's thinned. You probably don't know

this is hellish hot for the twenty-third of June. . . . Tired?"

Abner sat back on the arm of the chair. In this quiet place, with the tapestry of souls at judgment, there was no need to pretend.

"Very tired."

Souls in the tapestry were scared heads rising from bells of lilies that floated on thin, formal clouds below the judge pretending to be a ferocious demon.

"Ego," Abner said. "Men pretending to be important enough to require a personal damnation."

"Men must pretend, son," said the giant, past the cigarette in his lips, "and your job, just now, is to remember that you are important. You've lost the fine art of taking yourself seriously. I have to see so many asses that I enjoy dealing with someone sensible. . . . Have your man drive you through the Park and then go home and go to bed. I'll be around in the morning. Oh, there's a diet list for your cook. I'll walk down with you."

Lamon got out of the car and looked suspiciously at the doctor. Abner watched them through the bowl, lying back on his cushions, while Lamon talked about Zerbetta, and a family named Ross, and the Duryeas. His hands were warmer than they had been when he was driven to this house coated in white stucco. But the bowl was firm around him. He heard Lamon talking, and saw

his shoulder twitch under blue cloth, and counted white strands in the doctor's beard.

"'At's a good man, Cousin Abner! . . . What did he say about you?"

"More pills. He says I can go to Canada in couple of weeks if I'm good. But I'm to have meals in bed, and not to smoke if I can stop it."

"Well, you do like he says to, Abner."

Lamon patted his arm. His eyes glowed under his nat. . . . I am important to him. To a lot of people. Gil. Norah . . . He ran names through his mind. And then he was important, the glass melting from around him. He saw real bodies lying on turf as the car swam through the Park and watched Lamon's hand on his arm, the brown fingers vibrating, nervous and shy.

"Would you mind if Charlotte's father came down for a couple of days? He's a parson, but he's harmless. Very lively and good fun."

"I wouldn't mind, Abner. It's your house, anyhow. Don't be so damn polite!"

Abner laughed.

"Try to think up what you know about pigeons and doves. The old man's a maniac about them. Has a dovecot in the rectory garden, up there, and they shed feathers all over the churchyard. He gets more fun out of a ghastly dove than you would out of — of a prize-fight."

"Fights ain't so much fun, Abner. . . . I got knocked out boxin' — out at a club in Los Angeles. Yow! This fella slugged me on my button an' then got me a stroke of lightnin' on my jaw. Had to use ammonia on me, to bring me to. . . . We had some pigeons the year you and Cousin Charlotte came out home. Remember? . . . Abner, you ain't ever thought of gettin' married — again?"

Abner said simply, "No, I never have." A life beat in his heart. He wanted to go on, and went on, "No. I'd known Charlotte ever since she was a little girl. Dr. Sanford was the Latin master at my school. I never thought anything about the child. Then I stopped off to see her father one day. I was motoring with some people through Connecticut. He'd taken this parish. And there she was. I fancied myself a good deal in love with another girl at the moment. And I wasn't impressed with Charlotte. And then I fell in love — and stayed in love. No, Lame, I couldn't get married again."

The big man said, "She was awful nice," and patted his cousin's arm.

A clock ticked Abner forward as the car rolled. This life spread through him widely, a sense of blood pulsing. He had been absurdly sacrificing to a ghost, and that was comic, without laughing at the ghost. He would never laugh at this, but it had been absurd.

"Michael, go down to Mr. Weinsheimer's place. Fortieth Street."

"Yes, sir."

People on the streets were shading eyes from the sun. It ran from the west in bowels of light through these streets, webbing everything in a common moisture. Men high on scaffolds in Fifth Avenue showed tags of wet hair under naked arms, and women fanned themselves on the sidewalks between bursts of light. The sun cleaned walls of the Library, when Michael slowed the car at Forty-second Street. It had almost a beauty, stretched white against duller buildings beyond its aimless line of roof. Figures lolled on the railing of the terrace, watching the street. The doves — or were they pigeons? — flickered on statues in shadowed niches, and one white dove circled a flagpole with senseless diligence.

"Here," Abner said, getting down, "I'll take a cab home. Go and get Miss Parcher and cool the poor child off. Drive up the Hudson or somewhere. Run along. I may be some time in with Gilbert."

"Well, that suits me, Cousin Abner. Can't drive far. Dinner engagement."

Lamon grinned, and the car passed from the curb. Frankie or the pretty girl from Zerbetta? . . . Abner thought of Frankie De Lima, ivory in her bed, and

wondered if Lamon had any pennies left. The boy might be pitifully trying to play the rich man. . . . No, that was not Lamon. He was more solid.

He was a clay of undisturbed talents. He sat and ruined blotters with grotesques of kine and people. They had let him make strings of funny prize-fighters for this journal in Chicago, until he lost the job of collecting bad debts for the manager and went back to the pretty, low house in the shallow valley. He sat beside the telephone, waiting for his woman to call him, and told sharp little tales of Los Angeles and Seattle. He was sometimes shrewd. . . . But there was no ambition in him. He would lounge off, when he tired of Frankie, and sit in his father's dairy yard, drawling with the hired men. He would tell his friends about his time with Frankie, and they would think him lying, because he would be just Lamon Coe, Uncle John's son, and not the lover of an ivory woman — only Lamon would not say that she was ivory — in a room of silks.

Gilbert Weinsheimer, in a brown suit, looked up from the business of signing his name to many folds of paper on his desk's glass top. He took a handkerchief and wiped his face.

"You look better, Abner."

"I feel like a piece of seaweed. . . . No, I am better. Got some new pills and I'm to be allowed to go to Can************************

ada in July, if I'm good. But I'm to stay in bed a lot and eat broth, and pills."

"Then you will come to Canada?"

"I just said so."

The lawyer grinned. Abner looked away at three white doves parading in the sun on the Library's dirty roof. . . . I am important to him. I must pretend to be important, because they like me. I shall go on living.

"Didn't father build a bridge near Portland?"

"That's filial! Two bridges in Oregon. Early work," said Gilbert. "He wasn't allowed his own way with them, either. Might go look at them. Oregon's a hand-some piece of real estate."

He began talking gruffly of Oregon and farther Canada, turning his crescent glasses on a thumb. The bowl formed once around Abner, but he shook through it, and then Gilbert walked with him to the elevator.

"You're to stay in bed?"

"Yes. He thinks I'd better. My appetite's got to be babied a little."

"I'll drop in after dinner, maybe."

There was a woman astonishingly big with child in the elevator. Abner watched her lumber into the street and walked very slowly after her toward Fifth Avenue. A dove sank from the Library's roof past so much stone washed white by the intense sun and then moved recklessly on the heavy rail of the terrace, close to a lounging man who put out a shy hand toward its breast. Abner's mind beat in this stir of bodies and sights, and a power rose against his heart, hastening its tick. He crossed the street and stood in front of the banal library, watching a boy flap his shoes as he ran up the steps as if he must hit each tread loudly. Another dove fell from the roof and flared in the sunlight over heads of lingering people, and a fair girl turned up her face to look at the wheeling wings. Beauty came with her gesture, and she did not know it. The sun rang on white stone of the terrace, while the building's front was gray, and then the whole immensity of stone flowed toward him in a white music and a cry from God. . . .

A policeman had his arm. People were thick around him.

[&]quot;Can you get me a cab, officer? . . . I'm — ill."

[&]quot;Just you stand here, sir."

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CHAPTER XIV

THE tent of silk was dim and Lamon banged an elbow on a chair, getting to the telephone on its black wood. He stopped to rub the bruised skin and scowled at Frankie because she laughed, reaching for a new cigarette. Then he sat down on a cool chair and picked up the telephone violently.

"Yeh?"

Nobody spoke for a time.

"Ask Mrs. De Lima to speak to me."

"Well, who are you? . . . It's two o'clock. She's in bed."

"Tell her it's important," the man said.

Lamon grinned and put a hand on the black mouth.

"The gentleman says it's important."

"Who is he?"

"I think it's him, honey. Ryan."

"Make him say, Lame."

Lamon said, "Mrs. De Lima won't come to the phone unless she knows who it is," and yawned into his damp shoulder, waiting to be answered from some other room, out in the hot darkness.

"Ask her to speak to Mr. Farrell."

"You ain't Farrell," Lamon said; "why don't you be

"Go to hell! Go to hell! Frankie'll speak to me, if you tell her it's me! . . . Tell her I must speak to her!"

Lamon jerked back his ear from the banging cry. Frankie slipped out of bed and came dimly bright through the room, the cigarette in her mouth. Lamon moved aside to let her stand comfortably. This was cruel on the kid, out there, because he would know how she looked.

"Costello, are you drunk?"

The answer made a tinkle in the room.

"Well, then go to bed an' please quit this. Be a white boy. . . . No! . . . No, Costello, I won't see you . . . Not any more. . . . I'm sorry. . . . Oh, please don't be so nasty! . . . Good-by."

She walked away, the silver band glistening around her hair, and Lamon knew that something said had hurt her, as she did not laugh, and did not look at him. The one light burning above the silken ceiling let down a cold shimmer on her naked arms and side, and she was silent as a ghost in a play on a screen, colorless.

"Well, one thing is, I'm goin' to send him back a pair of pearls he gave me at Christmas. He's nasty."

"Where did you run into him first, honey?"

"There's where I was a fool! . . . I don't know why a person naturally always thinks someone that's brave is a good kind of man. I was down at a beach last summer and he fetched a girl in that was drownin'. He did it good, too. He's a dandy swimmer. . . . I guess it's 'cause he knows he looks sweet in a bathin' suit. . . . But he did fetch this girl in fine. And then Hector Boscommon introduced us at a party. Boscommon was kind of leadin' him around to keep him out of trouble. He drinks too much. . . . Turn on a couple of more lights, honey. I'm goin' to send him those pearls back. It's the only stuff he gave me cost him much. Look out you don't run into him some time."

"Think he'd hurt me?"

"No. I'm thinkin' about him. . . . I don't want to be the start of a massacre. Lamon, I'd like to see you box, once."

Lamon laughed, and went dancing across the room to the tall mirror of the closet's door, making feints and little dodges with his head, and tapping the glass with his fingers at the end of phantom blows. New lights above the silk showed his feet pattering back and forth on the white rug and muscles bubbled in his arms awhile.

"Too slow on my feet, honey. . . . Where is it you keep your stuff?"

"Top drawer in the safe."

The safe would make any burglar or a boy who had been in a toolshop laugh. It was set in the wall of the closet, and gowns hid it, unless you happened to be looking for it. But he gravely brought the box and Frankie knelt on the floor, and began hunting out a case.

"You don't wear much of that junk."

"Don't like jewels. Only somebody you like gives you somethin', and you hate to sell it."

She stooped over the trays in the shape of a kid looking for a bug in grasses and was funny. Lamon picked up a silver pencil on the table and commenced scrawling her on a pad, while she poked fingers among black cubes and oblongs, snapping them open and shut, lifting her chin to look at a pin or an ear-ring in a mat of velvet, then closing the thing away.

"There they are!"

"You don't need 'em."

"Thanks. Drop 'em on the table, there. There's some corals in the bottom here I'm going to send out to Amity Fuller for her baby. Jen's so tickled it's a boy she'll be drunk a week."

She began delving in the bottom of the flat chest among chains and glimmering pins, messes of bracelets and toys. Lamon finished his sketch before she grunted, "Ow! It may be good luck to be pricked with a gold pin,

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but I'd just as soon not. A big bull like you don't mind bein' stabbed or so on, but I do."

"You're made of thin silk."

"More thanks."

Frankie piled a rope of coral on the floor, humming, and Lamon thought it would go to Jen's daughter, Amity Fuller, on the hills outside Los Angeles and be seen in photographs of the pretty star's baby, in the papers. . . . He ought to be more interested in these people who came to lunch and to tea in the white rooms downstairs, because Bob McCready and Tom Errol and Jimmy Meigs, his cousin, all would want to know about the actors and dancing women—all this raft of fools. But he paid no attention to them. . . . I'm like Bess. I don't make friends easy with people that just act polite to me. And they're a tough lot of folks. I bet Bill Ranulph knows stories about half of them.

"Ever hear of a man named Bill Ranulph, honey?"

"Sounds German. No . . . Who's he?"

"He was in my regiment — my battery. Got a medal of honor. Prize-fight manager."

The town was full of gay gangs of men and women, and Ranulph knew them. But most of them would not know about him. He was under all this top layer of rooms and costly restaurants, finding men for old women and silly girls.

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"What about this Randolph?"

"I was just thinkin' what you said about brave men not bein' so good. . . . He's about as tough as they come . . . Huh?"

"I thought I sold this thing ten years back!"

Trivial stars, blue and pale, were tremulous on her arms and breast, flowing from a loose band of bright links, little blue stones and brilliants. One point flickered on her belly as she sat, frowning at the thing hung on a finger.

"Give us your wrist, Lame."

"What for?"

"Reach it here."

Lamon grinned, but the band went around his brown wrist and she locked it, and knelt stroking the jewels. She was so grave, doing this, that he did not laugh, and then she sat on her heels with a finger in his hand.

"Give it to your next girl, honey."

"Ain't ever goin' to be a next girl, honey."

"Stuff! . . . Give it to one of your cousins. Your aunt's got daughters, you was sayin'. Or give it to your aunt."

"No, honey."

"I don't want it, Lame. . . . Some folks in this damn world are wicked. Know that? They're mean. Mean as dirt. . . . God, you can have a good time

without bein' a hog! . . . It'd be a joke on him for some nice girl to have that. I bet he never paid for it, either. I bet God he didn't! You give that to some nice girl, Lame, and I'll laugh my head off! Give it to the nicest girl you know. Do like I say, honey, please!"

"Why don't you sell it?"

"No. You give it to some nice kid for a weddin' present."

She sat piling boxes in the chest, and slammed down the lid sharply, finishing her anger with a laugh.

"One of your cousins'll be gettin' married. Keep it for her."

Lamon turned the band on his wrist while she hid the chest again in the foolish safe and came back for a cigarette. This must have cost some money, because the stones seemed to be sapphires and Abner said those were very high in price. He wanted to hear about the man who was a hog but he was scared of Frankie, standing silent with the cigarette in her fingers, looking down at his sketch.

"You could draw swell if you took any trouble with it, Lame."

"Aw . . . What's the good? Wouldn't put a bull in a good temper."

"You just are a farmer!"

He said, "I don't give a damn. Yes, I'm a farmer. I

ran into a kid from out home this afternoon and talked about it for a couple of hours. . . . I got to get me a job, honey. I have to have some work that'll pay me enough to do so's I'll be able to go home an' buy into Tom Errol's garage business, or go shares on a farm, or somethin'. . . . I'm kind of blue."

"Oh, honey. . . . "

"Don't start kissin' me! I feel better about Abner, 'cause he's got a good doctor, now, and all of that, but I'm blue. Tell me it's silly bein' homesick and how stupid a little town is — Yes. But it's — where I'm from."

"Honey, I bet your father ain't really mad at you."

"Yes, he is. I got to go back an' get some sleep, 'cause this kid from home said to have lunch with him, and I'm awful tired, sweetheart," he said, with his arms around her; "and I'll come 'round in the afternoon."

"Poor Lame!"

"You're awful good to me, Frankie."

"I love you," she said, into his hair.

"I love you. . . . Let me get dressed. . . . "

He went down the stone steps into darkness and heat, for all the lower windows were fast, and the lamp in the upper hall was dead. Lamon groped for his hat on the marble bench under the stairs and tinkled the silver *************** 229 ************

bowl always filled with cigarettes. He took one, then found his hat and stood hunting a match.

"Oh, Lame!"

"Yeh?"

"Leave the front door unlocked. Louise lost her key, and she's always the first one here in the morning."

Frankie's cigarette hung in the blackness, lighting just her face, where she stood on the stairs.

"All right, sweetheart."

"And give Abner my regards."

"Sure. . . . "

She ran off upward, humming, and Lamon walked to the bronze door. He found a match and clicked the catch of the lock. Air wavered on his face, and he walked out on the stone platform. Over in a corner one page slept on a stool, his white chest showing in his undone jacket. Lamon stepped down on the driveway.

He was tired, and a muscle jerked in his back. His room at Abner's house would be cooler than the silky tent, and he must get rested before he took Bess Parcher to lunch. He must ask Abner about some quiet little eating-place where nobody gay would be, and Frankie would not hear of it.

Park Avenue was like an empty box. Walls went up and windows higher were black holes where the panes did not get any light from the street's lamps. His feet raised an echo that recoiled on him from everywhere, and that angered him into cursing aloud. . . . But what was the good of being angry, because his feet made a lonely noise. Bessie said what he needed was to be less excitable about everything. Funny having a girl that age scold you.

Somewhere deep in the city a rooster crowed.

Lamon stood waiting for the next call, and then remembered that there was not another farmyard where birds would hear the sound.

CHAPTER XV

M. Boscommon walked along tiles of the hallway and tried to repress the old man in white duck who wanted to talk to him. But he had to walk or he would begin to rave aloud, waiting for Ambrose to come down, and, walking, he must pass so close to this old servant who knew him by name that the fool would be tempted to speak. He spoke.

"Dreadful business, sir."

"Very. Very."

"Such a young fellow, too, sir."

"Yes. . . . I say, go and tell my driver that he's not to try to speak to Mr. Ryan. I don't want him upset. . . . And stay there to get the door open for us. . . . Here."

The old fool hurried down steps and under the awning to Mr. Boscommon's black car. Mr. Boscommon walked and hated himself for not thinking. His head was full of humming blurs, sounds that were shadows, thirds of pictures. He had dressed without bathing at six, and sweat ran inside his gray suit, inside his polished brown shoes. Another servant in white was watching him from

just within the doorways, a young Greek, but he had no right to speak to the tall man in gray.

An elevator crashed open and Ambrose Ryan came down the tiles. Mr. Boscommon took his arm and felt the heavy stuff of a winter's cloth, and smelled camphor. Poor Ambrose had taken a black suit from some closet. Ridiculous . . . Awful! But his eyes seemed all right.

"Come along, old man. '

"What about cabling mother, Uncle Hector?"

"I'll see to that, Ambrose. . . . Where's Monsignor Ryan?"

"Chicago."

Something good sent him there. A sort of good destiny, his mind said. He helped Ambrose into the car and saw that the panel of glass between themselves and the driver was fast in place. Then he leaned back in the cushions and rubbed his chin with his eyeglass.

"Thank God I had sense enough to wire you on Monday."

"Thank God you did, old man. . . . Try to take it easy. You can't, but try to — to not think at all."

"But you want me to see this man Coe?"

"Not unless you have to, old man," his master told Ambrose.

"I ought to see him. I'm — I'm C's brother."

"No. I'm sure I shall be able to handle him, Am-

brose," said Mr. Boscommon. "Now, let me get things exactly straight. You telephoned me at just six. I had to wait forever for a taxicab. . . . It was seven, nearly, when we went into C's bedroom and found him. He woke you at about — what do you think?"

"It was ab-bout half an hour before I telephoned for you, Uncle Hector. Sat on my bed and told me. Then he slammed off into his room. He was crying. . . . I sat and thought a minute, and then I telephoned you to come over."

Mr. Boscommon's mind said, They must get out of that apartment at once. I can't let him remember this. They must stay at the country house all fall. . . . He's fine. He's been fine all morning, ever since then.

"Uncle Hector?"

"Yes, Ambrose."

"Don't suppose that C just imagined he did it? imagined it all?"

Hector Boscommon's throat shut and he had to stiffen out its muscles and breathe hard. He put his arm around the gentleman's shoulders and said," No, old man. I've been down at her place. Frankie's dead. It's quite true."

Ambrose bent forward to pick up a string of amethyst beads from the floor of the car. One brown fist held these and the other rubbed his black knee.

"I'll do just what you say, Uncle Hector."

"Yes, sonny . . . Ambrose, it is not a question of morality. God," said Mr. Boscommon, "will forgive anything you do. It's — it's above morality, Ambrose. It's mercy. I'm not thinking of your mother, and Monsignor Ryan, and —" His mind had dropped the names of all those Brophy aunts. He said, "everyone else who loved C. It's this girl. She was one of a decent, quiet family out in the country, and they were devoted to her. They'd overlooked something once — when she was in the scandal over Evart's will. William Evart left her that apartment and some money. Her people forgave her that. They thought she was living on commissions from the shops. If this comes out, the cheap scandal papers will have stories about her. Her people will be disgraced. They'll know everything. You must think of them."

"Poor girl," said Ambrose.

Mr. Boscommon's mind was emptied of everything for a time. The car was scudding down Park Avenue in sunlight, he knew, and his body sweated. Ambrose began quietly to weep, with no stir in his grave face and just the motion of his chin wrinkling a little as the tears flickered. This was best. It ceased.

"He'd simply gone insane, Ambrose."

[&]quot;Th-there goes Norah Lambert," Ambrose said, soon; "in that car."

[&]quot;I didn't notice."

"She was in a car," the gentleman said, "with a big man, with a beard. Sh-she was awf'ly fond of C. Used to tease him a lot — at our place."

He turned his dark head and looked through the rear window at something going north in the white street.

"You chaps who play polo have such quick eyes."

The machine curved east and slowed down before a house unusually wide. Mr. Boscommon had often wondered who lived in the place, walking past its white front. This was Abner Coe's. A slim man in a very good brown suit was smoking a cigarette on the steps. Not a servant. Not Coe . . . Jewish. Odd.

"Just stay here, Ambrose."

"All right, Uncle Hector."

"I'll come and get you if it's necessary," Mr. Boscommon said, and got down from the car into heat that slashed his neck.

He walked easily up to the brown person on the steps and took out his cardcase rather slowly.

"Can you tell me if Mr. Lamon Coe is at home?"

"He's in no condition to see anyone," the man answered in a dry, hard fashion; "there's been —"

"I know. It's appalling to have to intrude, but he must give me a minute. I'm obliged to leave the city immediately, and there's something I'm obliged to tell him, in person."

"I'm Mr. Coe's legal representative, I suppose." His lawyer. Already!

"May I not see him? It's a frightful thing to have to do, but —"

"Oh, very well! He may be willing to see you."

"This is Mr. Gilbert Weinsheimer, of course?"

My memory is tremendous, he thought, and thank God! That pleased him just enough to give me a foot inside the door. I can make him listen to me.

"I must simply appeal to your mercy, Mr. Weinsheimer. May I come in and tell you what's happened?"

"Of course," said Mr. Weinsheimer, decently; "we can go into the library."

He was taken past a slab of pure yellow stone into a room of the first floor, shimmering with books to its height. Someone walked on the ceiling of this place; the noise of pacing feet came down as the sound of a muffled drum. Funeral march, Boscommon's mind said. That was Lamon Coe.

"This has been a terrible shock," the lawyer murmured, sitting down on a low chair; "I've known Abner ever since I was twelve years old. . . . I was his father's office boy. Saw him for a minute after dinner. He was in bed. Looked a little better than usual. . . . Body's just left the house."

"My God!"

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"Eh?"

"Is Mr. Abner Coe dead?"

The lawyer put thin crescent glasses on his nose and looked up at the tall man slowly, as if he thought him absurd.

"Why, yes. He died in his sleep. Some time this morning."

A river of cold water went running down Mr. Boscommon's spine and his legs stiffened. He walked over to the fireplace and picked up a tiny clock with an ivory face from the mantelshelf. Italian work, he saw, and very fine. But the cold water poured on his back, and his hands sweated.

"I feel that my intrusion is — is probably unbearable, Mr. Weinsheimer."

"You said that you must see Lamon?"

"Yes . . . I must. Does the poor fellow know that Mrs. De Lima — Were you aware of the connection?"

"Good God," said Weinsheimer, "what's happened to her?"

"Her apartment t-took fire early this morning and Frankie was burned to death. A lady on the fourth floor smelled smoke. The tenants just above Frankie — Mrs. De Lima — had gone to the country. Nothing could be done, when the fireman got there. She was — utterly consumed," said Mr. Boscommon; "the body was not

even recognizable." He was an English gentleman, now, and his deep voice, gently intoning every syllable, returned upon him from the room's depth in a grand melody. "Hideous, is it not? I knew the poor girl very well, Mr. Weinsheimer. . . . I felt that I must see Mr. Coe. Certain things . . . We're so very slightly acquainted. My God, calamity on calamity!"

Perhaps that last sentence was bad. Mr. Weinsheimer sat looking at the black rug, his sallow hands loose on a knee.

"I'll tell him."

"Ask him to see Hector Boscommon. He knows my name at least."

The lawyer got wearily out of the chair, and put his glasses in a case and then slipped the case in a pocket.

"He's stunned, Mr. Boscommon. He's been trying to get a relative in Ohio — their aunt — on the telephone ever since —"

"I must see him," Mr. Boscommon said, "for this reason. I'm the representative of the Ryan brothers—their manager. A family friend." He did not hesitate; "Costello Ryan killed himself this morning, when the news came. He was insanely in love with Mrs. De Lima. There'd been a connection. He cut his throat open. Broke a mirror and cut his throat open. His brother and I literally walked into the blood on the floor."

Mr. Weinsheimer gave a suddenly loud laugh. It began quietly and ended in a clatter.

"Nice morning! — I did that once. My father got melancholia after my mother died. Haunted, you know? . . . Yes?"

"Costello was insanely—" I said that before—
"madly in love with her. He telephoned to her apartment late last night. Mr. Coe answered the telephone.
Do you follow me?"

"No."

Anger put brass hands on Boscommon's throat and shook him.

"This — this wretched little beast of a boy was his mother's idol — Ambrose is worth a billion of him! Ten billion of him! He wasn't even civilized! . . . I beg your pardon. . . One really can't help breaking out! . . . Costello was the idol of his mother and his uncle — that's Monsignor Ryan — and his aunts. Miss Ida Brophy and Miss Veronica—I can't have things made worse, you see? As a lawyer, you've seen so many of these situations, Mr. Weinsheimer. I must prevent them from knowing that C — that Costello killed himself for a — a light woman. If they ever heard that he telephoned to her at midnight and killed himself when he heard she was gone. . . . His mother's at Lourdes. The whole family's out of town. He was alone in the

apartment with his brother. Mrs. Ambrose Ryan and the children are at Southampton, for the summer."

"How can you conceal a suicide?"

Mr. Boscommon lifted his face and stared at the lawyer.

"My dear sir! We have not tried to conceal the suicide! It's the connection with a — with Mrs. De Lima, that —"

"Oh . . . I beg your pardon. Something you said misled me. You — you just don't want it known that this boy telephoned to Mrs. De Lima last night?"

"Precisely."

"That would shock his mother and his aunts. . . . I understand. But what will you tell them caused the suicide?"

"They know that he drank too much, Mr. Weinsheimer. I'll take that line. Mrs. Ambrose Ryan knows that he's been drinking heavily. We can take that line. All that I'm trying to do is to — to throw myself on Mr. Coe's mercy. I'm sure he'll understand the situation. . . . And all these cheap scandalous papers will be on his heels if he's heard of, you see? A man in her apartment at — at one o'clock in the morning."

I am black down to my feet with this. I am stinking with lies.

He went on, "She had so many fine qualities, Mr.

Weinsheimer. I could tell you hundreds of good things about the poor girl. It's — it's an act of mercy to keep this hushed up. She was not avaricious. She lived mostly on commissions from milliners and decorators. In her world she had endless opportunities for that sort of thing. She was very loyal and —'' Damn the telephone! "— and —''

"Pardon me. The servants are too upset to —"
"Of course."

Mr. Weinsheimer went into the hallway.

"Yes? . . . Yes, someone was calling Zerbetta, Ohio. . . . Yes, get her on the wire, please — Oh, Lamon! Lamon, they've got your aunt on the wire."

A white robe came whirling down the stairs. Mr. Hector Boscommon stiffened against the fireplace, seeing Mr. Weinsheimer step back into the library. Everything whirred and beat in his head. His eyes dimmed. Through all this he heard a man howling.

"... Get her on the wire!... Aunt — Oh, God! — Get her on the wire... Aunt Marian?... Yeh, this is Lame — Lamon... Aunt Marian, he's dead... Cousin Abner's dead... Died in his sleep! Get on the train and come here! Hustle!... You got to! You got to!... Yeh, his doctor came round this mornin' and he was dead... He hadn't any blood left in him. He was all — all thin. ... Get on the

train and come here. . . . Wire me what train! I'll meet you. . . . G'bye. . . . "

He appeared at the foot of the stairs and stood beating a fist on the rail, making the sound of a drum. When he stopped that, he looked at his brown fist and then seemed to wash the hand in his white robe. Sweat glittered all over his unbelievable face and showed in a bright stream on his naked chest inside the gown.

"Lamon."

"H-have 'em make me some coffee, Mr. Weinsheimer."

"Haven't you had breakfast, Lamon?"

"No. . . . Luis woke me up. Where's Miss Lambert gone to?"

"She went away with Dr. Henry, Lamon. Lamon, come in here a minute —"

"Why didn't those God damn doctors say he needed a lot of blood! I g-gave a kid in France a whole gallon of blood — dunno how much. Dunno his damned name — Wh-what's the matter?"

He looked through the door and Mr. Boscommon saw his eyes, fearful and black under the movement of three purple leaves on his forehead. He stared.

"Oh. . . . Hell about Frankie, ain't it? Yeh. . . . That's hell! . . . Excuse me. I'm all shot to pieces!"

He rambled up the stairs and tripped in his white robe

while Boscommon could see him going. He began walking above them in another room.

"He knows, then."

"Oh," said the lawyer, "someone telephoned him. Just as Miss Lambert came. I recollect."

Hector Boscommon's legs stirred. He walked past Mr. Weinsheimer and passed up the stairs, found himself in a white dining-room with a round table and looked through an arched door at Lamon Coe striding along the floor of a great chamber where everything was black or white. Light smouldered in a piano near the southern windows and light lay on a black desk. Between these black points the white robe went swirling. Infinite time passed while he looked at this man.

"I was in Cleveland, on a party, when grandpop died. Didn't feel so bad. He was awful damn old. Eightyseven. . . . Got married when he was seventeen . . . Lots of boys did 'at, back then."

Mad with fright. Absolutely mad with fright. It's all right.

"My dear fellow, can't you cry?"

"Naw! I wish to God I could! I wish I could! Got a cigarette on you?"

"Of course, old man."

But he went on pacing. When the robe slipped from a shoulder, he would twitch it back. His hairless chest

blazed wet when he turned and the muscles played under his skin with an incessant sliding.

"All 'at damn silk! You spoke about it. At the party when she played the drum. You was there . . . I mind you tellin' her it was dangerous. It was, too . . . She was a good woman. I tell you she was a good woman. Abner thought so. He kep' her some — once. She was harmless. He said so. . . . Jen Fuller 'phoned me. That fat woman."

Do not think what I said about that silk. Don't go on thinking. You were standing to her left when I told that about the fire in Monterey. Never think of it. Don't think of it.

"She was smokin' a cigarette when I lef', last night. Had it in her mouth."

"Was there much drapery in her bedroom?"

"Aw, tons! Curtains at the bed . . . It was a tent. A kind of a tent."

Hector Boscommon said, "That's it, you see? I keep telling people it is not safe. The poor girl went to sleep with a cigarette beside her. Something of that kind."

"Yeh . . . I know. Two in the mornin'. She was sleepy. We'd been —"

He walked up the room and slammed his hands on the black piano. A great echo rose from the box and mingled with smoke in the sunlight, seeming to howl.

- "Mr. Coe —"
- "I tell you she was all right!"
- "Who knows it better than I do?"

"Yeh, but try to make father see 'at — or lots of people. Nice people . . . You tell 'em and they just say, 'Oh, a. . . .' She was not! Cousin Abner says she is a courtesan — in the grand manner. That's what he s —'" The word broke. He went on, ". . . said."

He leaned on the piano, looking at the white wall. One bare foot shifted in and out of a straw sandal.

Hector Boscommon walked down the room, summoning up greatness, but he was shaken with pity and his mouth worked. He put a hand on the man's shoulder and began speaking, letting his voice sink.

"My dear man, you must pull yourself together and listen to me. I've intruded on you in this way because I was a friend of Frankie's, and because we can't have scandal in the dirty newspapers. . . Listen to me. You answered Costello Ryan on the telephone, about one, perhaps, in the morning."

"Crazy little fool! Wouldn't tell me his name."

"Yes, old fellow. He telephoned again," said Mr. Boscommon, "early this morning. The firemen or someone told him about it. He woke his brother Ambrose. He was — simply raving with horror. Then he went into his bedroom and cut his throat with broken glass."

The lies were a sweat on his face.

"Crazy little — Cut himself?"

"He was dead when we got into his bathroom."

Lamon Coe moved his brown hands on the black piano and looked into its sheen.

"Poor little bast. . . . I'm sorry. They told him and he killed himself? . . . Lot o' good that did him! . . . There's no heaven. You get one life off God, and that's what you drew, and there's no more."

"Just so, old man. Quite right. There's no more. Listen to me. . . . It may seem offensive - vulgar and offensive - but I must warn you of something. We can't have this in the papers. You in her rooms at that hour. And you must not tell anybody - Mrs. Fuller, Farrell - that Goodwin girl — any of her friends. You must not tell them that Costello Ryan telephoned to her. It would be too good - good news for these dirty scandalmongering papers. You see? It's a fine chance for these sensational journals. A millionaire killing himself on account of a light woman - a demimondaine. And you would be dragged in. Do you see? The lover in her rooms. It would be all over the country. Your relations would hear of it. and we both know how illiberal — how provincial some people are. Forgive me for taking this tone. But I'm fiftynine years old. I've seen such things. Often. Your sisters, you know, wouldn't like to see your name in the -"

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The man huddled down on the piano.

"I ain't got any sisters."

He seemed not to be thinking. Black hair was matting over the scars.

"Your relatives won't like it."

"Dad," Lamon Coe said, looking at the wall.

Hector Boscommon stepped back from the smell of sweat. It was amazing how the hard shoulder sweated. Nerves, he thought. He's unstrung. He can hold nothing in.

"It's simply no good trying to explain poor Frankie to
— to the armies of the respectable."

"Respectable," Lamon Coe said; "just respectable!"

"You and I know she was all right, my dear fellow, but —"

The man rubbed his hands on the black wood of the piano and blinked, hastily speaking.

"Lemme see if I got it right. Costello — Costello Ryan killed himself this mornin' after he heard about—her — and you want me to never say he telephoned to the place last night?"

"Just so. He telephoned to her apartment very early this morning. He woke his brother and fairly raved at him. Then he went into his room — into his bathroom and killed himself."

"Yeh . . . It's straight. I'm so cold my head won't

work. . . . Her and Cousin Abner. Good to me. Good to me. Father didn't 'prove of Abner, neither. Said he was flippant. And she — Cousin Charlotte used to smoke cigarettes. Out at the place. If dad heard about Frankie —"

I have him. Some pious old father in the country.

"Don't talk to anybody. Don't see anyone. You're in mourning for Mr Coe. Don't let Frankie's friends come in here and gossip about it. . . . She'll be buried at her home town, I suppose. If there's a funeral service don't go. Why distress yourself?"

"I'm not goin' to let 'em have the coffin open at Cousin Abner's funeral. I won't stand for it. . . . Excuse me . . . No, no," the man said, washing his hands in his robe, "I won't say nothin'. How much family has this kid got?"

"His brother and mother, and his father's brother—and some aunts."

"Damn tough on them! . . . No, sir. I won't say a thing."

"That's wise," said Mr. Boscommon, "and, what's more, it's kind. . . . I'm terribly sorry to have had to intrude, old man. Did it for the sake of —"

"Oh, I 'preciate it!"

Hector Boscommon went down the stairs and paused in the hallway to admire the yellow marble slab carrying his gray hat. He took the hat and turned slowly into the

library, where Mr. Weinsheimer was reading a long paper, which had been folded several times, and smoking a cigarette.

"That poor boy's suffering terribly, Mr. Weinsheimer."

"Crying?"

"No. I've seen it before. He says he's cold. Sweating like a horse. It's fear. Intimate fear, if I may use that expression." Why not? Not so stilted. "I've seen a cowpuncher who'd killed men get in that state when one of his friends died in the bunkhouse. Brought it home to him."

"I'll be glad when his aunt gets here," said the lawyer. He took off his glasses and laid them on the paper; "I hate being an executor. And I'm sentimental about this house. It'll be sold, under the will. You English have your old historic houses. All we have in this damned country is— some sort of place where a fine man lived. And his father was fine, too. His father was Philip Coe, the engineer."

"Mr. Coe was charming. I met him once or twice."

An enormous pain was swelling in the room. Boscommon dropped his card on the table and said, "If I can be of the least service, in anything, please let me know, Mr. Weinsheimer," and walked into the hall. He opened a white door and the sun slashed his face again. He stood

on the steps lighting a cigarette and saw that his hands were not black. He had come through with it, and here was the sun cursing down above the houses, and there was Ambrose silent in the great car.

Two men, a tall chap who minced and swung a portfolio from his hand, and a short, pale man in brown came to the steps.

"... absurd! Commonplace people don't think in images, Bill!"

"I'm an onion if they don't! Of course they do! Imagistic thought is archaic thought. The first mental impulse is to create images for things — sensations and the rest of it."

The tall man laughed affectedly. Hector Boscommon hated him for the laugh and walked down the steps. Both men gave him sharp, considering glances.

"Were you calling on Mr. Abner Coe?"

"Yes."

"I'm sorry," Boscommon said, "but Mr. Coe died in his sleep. And don't bother his cousin and Mr. Weinsheimer. They're sufficiently wretched."

He walked between them, told his driver to go home, and got into the car, shaking with hatred of the world, of fools and liars. But he said, "Nothing to worry about, Ambrose. . . . Just don't worry. The poor devil saw the point at once, about everything. Said to tell you that he's

frightfully sorry. He's in dreadful shape. His cousin died in the night, and he's all alone."

"Then he --"

"He's no notion of any such thing. We'll go over to my place. You must have a big nap, old man."

The car went up the white street passing insufferable people. His mind howled at these images on the sidewalk: "I killed a woman. She was leaning on a gold piano and I told a fool a story, and he remembered how to kill her. I am black with lies down to my feet."

People on the sidewalk admired the great car and the distinguished gentleman in gray. Ambrose turned his beads in a brown hand, praying to his god.

CHAPTER XVI

L AMON walked inside a tent of ice that nobody else could see and held his fists in his pockets to keep them warm. Everybody else was sweating and women fanned themselves in the cold shadow of the elevated railway. He stopped to let a train pass because it might fall off the rails, up there, and set fire to people in the street. Then he ran under the shadow and came out safe on the other side in this awful light that had no heat.

Maybe there was a stove in Bessie's boarding house, down in some kitchen, and she could take him down there and get him warm.

He used to run up to the Parcher house in winter and find the girl in the kitchen and sit and tease her. This was years ago, but she was still a good kid and she would help him to get warm again. It was all warm and safe where women were.

Steep sets of stairs came down from houses on Bess Parcher's street and this lying sun hammered sparks out of the windows. Away in front was that fence above the river. If he walked forever he would get to her house and be warm again. But he would never get there. This was bad as the time he walked from town in the blizzard. His frozen legs moved and he was not getting anywhere. If he tried to run he would bang himself on the tent of ice. Breath came out of his mouth but none went in. He was not getting anywhere. Some people looked at him, walking the other way. That was because he had not a black suit on and they knew that Abner was dead.

An old lady in a pink gown was sitting back of a window frame beside the door at the top of Bessie's stairs, fooling with scissors and a bowl of water. He had come to the bottom of the stairs but there was no way of getting up the gray steepness. He was dead, standing here, and his feet would not go. Up there was the door.

The door came open and Bess Parcher walked down the steps in a white dress. Lamon put up his hands to break through the ice and saw them flapping before his eyes.

"Lamon Coe, you walked over here without a hat?"

He said, "I got to get warm! Honey, I'm all cold . . . Cousin Abner died. He died in his sleep."

"Lame! Oh, you poor boy!"

"He was all thin. I got to get warm. . . . Take me where it's warm, honey."

Lamon climbed the steps. When he got to the girl he put his face in her neck and was safe, and warm.

"Oh, Lamon!"

"Take me in where it's all warm. I'm goin' to cry. I've got to cry."

CHAPTER XVII

RS. PARCHER was a big, fair woman who bobbed as she walked down the platform and began chattering at the top of her voice to Aunt Marian. She said, "Well, Marian Meigs, I hope to goodness that you're just a little ashamed of yourself! I suppose you just stood there and laughed all through the wedding and wrote that telegram yourself!" But she was laughing, and poked Mrs. Meigs in the side of her black gown, and then came on and took Bess in her arms.

Lamon had to grin. His thin aunt was enjoying this to beat time, and a lot of men under the lip of the station's roof were laughing.

"Well, look at the bridegroom!"

"How you, Bob?"

Bob McCready shook hands and suddenly spun a handful of rice up in the air. It hissed down around Bess in her white gown, and banged on the rim of Lamon's straw hat. People shoved heads out of the train's windows and then you couldn't hear anything when the wheels moved and the green cars rumbled so close. Bessie's three aunts and some girls charged at her and the bracelet of diamonds and blue stones was grabbed and pawed.

"Isn't that simply gorgeous? Did Lame let you pick it out yourself?"

"He did not. Oh, Henry, I was looking for you. You see, I was home for your birthday, after all."

Young Henry Parcher said that he had lost a bet on it and rubbed his nose on her cheek, shuffling his feet around on the cement. He was a pretty, skinny kid. Lamon hoped they were looking after his diet. It might be just the boy's age. His voice creaked, when he mumbled something to Lamon, very shy.

"Much of a crowd in town yesterday, Henry?"

"Oh, say! It was the biggest Fourth of July crowd they ever had! And two men from Columbus got killed down the road. By the Duryea place. Car turned over on 'em."

"Burned?"

"No, just busted 'em dead."

"That ain't so bad. If - How d'you do?"

Mr. Parcher in a linen suit that did not fit, said, "Well, Lamon, this was kind of sudden." His sleepy voice was ashamed of itself, and he scoured his chin with a hand.

"Suppose it looked kind of sudden. How's my father?"

"John's all right, son. Who was this Dr. Sanford married you two children? I'm not acquainted with the New York churches."

Lamon said, "He's my Cousin Abner's father-in-law — Cousin Charlotte's father. He was down for Abner's

funeral and stayed on a couple of days. He's a good man.
. . . Oh, hello, Tom!"

Tom Errol had a bunch of little white roses for Bess and a heavy wink for Lamon. But his nice manners kept him standing with no hat on his red hair talking to the women and then he walked down with Lamon to the freight office, holding his arm.

"That was too bad about your cousin, Lame. Say, I'm glad you're back! . . . I had a diplomatic conversation with your dad yesterday. The ice is runnin' out to sea on the spring tides."

"Yeh?" Lamon gasped.

"Oh, the old man's all right, Lame. Don't take a mere father so seriously. Just wants his feet licked some. Many's the time when I was at college that I wrote home about the high cost of living and got a growl."

"Was there a man named Farrell — kind of pink — in your class at Princeton, Tom?"

"James Michael Farrell? Played baseball. Yes. Why?"

"Met him at a party in New York. Lots of money and not much sense. . . . Always says what somebody told him about something. . . . Hello, Patsy!"

He shook hands with two men in the freight office and gave orders about letting him know when boxes came from New York. Beyond the doors of this cool shed, trees flowed in the wind, mingling their leaves. He was

home. There was no strangeness in anything. He had come home. But he was not awake.

"Going to give yourself and bride a honeymoon?"

"What on earth for? Got to get me a job. . . . Won't draw anything from Abner's estate for God knows when. Months."

Tom Errol stopped walking back up the platform and said, "Tell us the truth, Lame. Dr. Meigs is spreading it around town that you and your aunt get about half a million between you."

"Hell's delight! Naw! Here, I don't want folks thinkin' that, Tommy. No. . . . There's an awful lot of the estate goes to build somethin' for this children's hospital. In memory of Cousin Charlotte and their kid. And the estate ain't half a million, to begin with, and a whole lot of it goes to this hospital in Connecticut for a children's room, memory of Cousin Charlotte and their kid, and he lef' money to everybody'd been workin' four years for him, and some to some old clerks worked for his father. Why, Mr. Weinsheimer says Aunt Marian an' me get about fifty thousand apiece, when we get it. Gave me a thousand in advance. Have to skin along on that, and some more money I had anyhow, until this comes in from the estate. . . . And I wish to God Cousin Abner still had it."

Cousin Charlotte's father said he would get over think-

ing about Dr. Henry bending down to press an ear to Abner's bared chest in the white bedroom and would remember anything else, kind things and gay things, and that the funeral in New Canaan, and Miss Lambert smashing her cane on the slick little brown gravestone near the chapel — all that would go out of his head. But his throat was still hurting when he got into the car.

"I got to stop at the bank, Mr. Parcher, please. Hate luggin' checks around with me."

"Our worldly all," said Bess.

"It ain't much of an all, either."

"Oh, well," said Mrs. Parcher, "you children are back where they don't rob you for every breath you draw!"

He thought, "Well, they know I'll have the place when he dies, and they ain't scared about it. And Bess says her bedroom's big enough to get on in and maybe dad'll come down to earth. He's always said she was a nice girl. I remember him saying that. This is a girl he approves of, not like . . ."

"How much is a ticket to Lima?" a man asked near him on the platform.

"One dollar and two cents," Patsy Burke drawled, shoving a truck along.

Lamon put the match to his cigarette and waved it out as Mr. Parcher got the car going. It would be all right to sneak over to Lima, some time, and ask around for some folks named Reichmann. He could say a man asked him to turn in this check.

"Honestly, Lamon," Mrs. Parcher said, breathlessly, "you were a perfect baby to give Bess this thing!"

"A man only gets married once."

One thing he must never do, and that was to tell Bess where the sapphires and diamonds came from. She liked the bracelet too much to spoil it on her, and if they ever had a fight about anything, why, he must shut his teeth and never say it. He cuddled her hand under his, and felt safe. This was the thing about being married that puzzled him, after six days, and he must ask Tom Errol how he felt. You felt safe. Nobody could shove you out of there. Everything was yours, and this was how wives were different from. . . . But don't think so much about her. You might say something. You could tell Bess about some of the other ones, not about her. Too soon before. . . . Here's the bank.

Men came up and Anson Lauffler pretended to kiss him on the cheek and was lewd in his ear. Lamon thought how nice all the women thought Anson was, and

grinned, shaking hands with old Mr. Ross, president of

the brown bank.

"I hear you've come into some money from Phil's boy's estate, Lamon."

"I guess about third as much as they're saying, sir."

"Well, take care of it, Lamon. You've married a mighty nice girl."

"You ain't got to tell me, sir."

"Ran around the whole country and married the girl next door, didn't you? Good thing, too. Mrs. Ross'll come over and see about getting you youngsters to dinner pretty soon. Hot in New York?"

"Fierce!"

But someone was standing on the dirty old tiles beside him. Mr. Ross smiled and stepped away. Lamon opened his new bankbook with cold fingers and looked at the two entries in red ink. He must look up in a minute and pretend not to be scared. . . . Has a gray shirt on. Everybody's looking.

"Well, Lamon . . ."

"I didn't see you, father. Lookin' at this. How are

"Pretty good," John Coe said, and put out his hand; "I saw Bessie in the car. You married the nicest girl I know of, around here."

"I think so, myself."

His father laughed, and stood peering at him with black eyes through the rimless spectacles that were new to Lamon. But he was still tall and hard, and his clothes hung in against his flat waist. A fine man to look at.

"You'll be staying at the Parchers' for your lunch."

"Yessir."

He was going to ask them out for a meal. Lamon saw it coming and tried to be blank, but he was hot all over and felt his mouth quivering, and knew that John Coe saw this.

"Better fetch Bessie over in the middle of the afternoon, then. I got your room cleaned out, this mornin'. She could use the room next for her sewin' and so on."

"Yessir."

But they must go on talking. People were looking at them.

"When did you get the glasses, sir?"

"This winter."

"Your eyes ain't really bad?"

"No. The left one twitches some."

"Well," said Lamon, "we'll be out about four, I guess."

"That'll suit me," Coe drawled, and walked off to one of the windows.

The car turned into Poplar Street from the red square and then into Grand Avenue, under the horse-chestnuts which shaded little houses of poor people. Everything in Lamon deadened to a sense of ease. It had happened just as Bess said it would, and there would be no trouble about anything. He leaned out to look at the horse-chestnuts and saw where one had been blown down.

"How'd that happen, Henry?"

Young Henry said it was a storm in May, and that the tree was old. He knelt on the front seat and looked at Lamon without stopping, all the way up this street, and out Homestead Street. Fields showed past houses and hammocks were red in yards.

"Mercy," said Mrs. Parcher, "but I hope Nettie hasn't spoiled that omelet. She is a good cook, but she has a kind of passion for putting parsley where it don't belong!"

"Lamon can eat anything, mamma. The steak on the train last night was just pure leather and he ate a ton of it."

He held her hand. He had a feeling of unchanging safety as long as he could touch her, and he did not care about young Henry grinning. Sunlight seemed a fire beyond the crest where her father's white house stuck up in a mass of oaks. The flat town ended, there, and the slope went down. He suddenly did not believe it: he was not home. He believed nothing, even when he walked along the porch and saw the road going downhill, and a lad in a dull shirt leading a bull somewhere in his father's fields. The river was a sickle of hot silver under the sun's height, and light burned his hands. But he stood in a dream, and walked down among the oaks as though they were trees that might change to houses in this sleep.

"Lame?"

"Love me some?"

"Don't be silly, Lamon. You look so tired."

He grinned.

"We didn't sleep much last night, honey."

"Sh-sh! But you do look tired."

The woman in his arms was going always to be there. He must be prudent about everything, never shock her, try never to quarrel. When people were good to a man, he ought to be good to them. He leaned on the crinkled body of an oak, and kissed her throat.

"Don't tell me you've never been in love before, Lame!"

"I have been - kind of - twice."

"It's so nice you don't pretend things. . . . Lamon, who was that pretty woman with you in the Walling Theater, the last night of May? The girl I was with, that silly Miss Bement, on my floor at Mrs. Vermilye's, told me I looked like her."

Lamon held her close, looking beyond her at the trees.

"You do, honey. Only . . . your eyes are kind of darker, and she must ha' been — say — thirty-three or four. She was a nice woman. Friend of Abner's. . . . She was mighty nice. Kiss me."

"Make me."

He kissed her throat. Just then he did not want to kiss her mouth.

"You looked so nice. We were sitting up in the gallery. You have such a — a beautiful body, Lame. I'm so proud of that."

"You proud of me?"

"Of course I am! You're so nice . . . and you've been so brave, and now everything's all right. And you're going to be good to your father, aren't you, and not have fights with him. He's so old, and I think he's proud of you."

"Get out!"

"Yes, I do. I think he's pleased that you never begged him to let you come home. I think that's why he wants us out there, right away."

"Think so?"

She held his face hard to hers, and then ran off up the grass to answer her mother on the porch. But Lamon had not waked from his dream. He went slowly down the yard to the white fence, and stood in the sunlight, staring at this land, where it sloped from him.

All the fields tilted with a gentle shimmering of grass that was green in the light, split by blue shadows of trees, and then the broad earth swept levelly toward the north, and a few vague hills were restless in the heat to the south. There it lay. He saw the four oaks back of the

long house, and the window of his room with a curtain blowing out from the white frame. A string of solemn cows stood in the pasture, staring toward him, and some men were crouched near the eastern gates of the dairy, perhaps at dice. There it all was.

But he could not wake. He had been very brave a long while not to come whining for a place here, and he was here, after it all. His being moved, a tiny blackness, through white cities and many rooms. He had survived so much, and there was no fear left for him. He could talk of cows to his old father, and be kind. This sun baked his dark hands on the fence, and this air moved. thick with the smell of grass. A wagon piled with red bricks came dragging up the hill behind three white horses, and Lamon spat three times for luck. A lad in a blue shirt walked whistling beside the horses, or talked to them in a jolly way, making them trudge the long road. This man leaned on hot wood, and watched the brick, and the haze flowing beyond its color, and was still in his dream. His lips stirred and he felt, not caring, that a salt entered them. But the boy tramping past beside the horses saw that his face was bright with tears.



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